SOULS IN KHAKI

A Personal Investigation into Spiritual Experiences

By ARTHUR E. COPPING

WITH A FOREWORD BY
GENERAL BRAMWELL BOOTH

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ARTHUR E. COPPING

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BEING A PERSONAL INVESTIGATION INTO SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AND SOURCES OF HEROISM AMONG THE LADS IN THE FIRING LINE

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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BY
ARTHUR E. COPPING

WITH A FOREWORD BY
GENERAL BRAMWELL BOOTH

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FOREWORD

BY GENERAL BOOTH

WAR is a confession of failure—a failure to live even on the level of an intelligent humanity. It is, in fact, a descent into the realm of nature "red in tooth and claw"—the realm, that is, of the fighting beast. And the fighting beast at a time when we can only see blood-shot eyes and blood-stained lips. But even so, it is not wholly bestial; sentiments of mutual respect for desperate foes, some regard for courage and endurance, some admiration for sacrifice, remain. Men do not finally lose control of themselves even in battle, nor do they depart wholly from submitting to the control of others.

The overwhelming sense of force and the appeal to force which takes possession of the mass in war and war time cannot destroy, may even encourage, the higher sense of the spiritual and the mystical. Men have said to me that in the very agony of conflict, and while the heavens were darkened with shot and shell and the earth itself shook under their feet, they have been more intimately conscious of the reality and presence of the Divine than in the quietude of normal life. I confidently anticipate that many men will return from their awful and cruel experiences of the war with a quickened sense

of the supernatural, and with a new power to "lay hold" of the eternal things.

And amid the abyssmal darkness in which the elemental forces rage and tear and slay, and while death—on a scale never before dreamed of—looks on, some other good things emerge and stand up and challenge. Love for country and human kind; love for home and wife and bairns—these are always to be found in every army, shining with a peculiar charm against the dark background of misery and hate. Love for God; love for goodness; devotion to comrades even unto death; surrender to a great cause; personal sacrifice for another's life;—these also are among the sweet and flagrant flowers that bloom even upon the stricken fields of war.

This little book, by a writer who describes what he himself has seen, and who has a gift both for the seeing and the describing, tells of some of those precious growths in the desert—few in number, no doubt, but so rich in their inherent force and beauty as to make the blood-stained wilderness blossom as the rose. For us of the Salvation Army the present fratricidal war is an inscrutable agony. Nevertheless it may be that, when much that now fills with horror a world of woe has passed away for ever, gracious deeds and experiences such as are referred to in the following pages may still remain a precious and enduring heritage to all who believe in the grace of God and in the power of Love.

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS OF THE SALVATION ARMY,
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INTRODUCTION

On the outbreak of war—a time so fruitful in false surmises and unfounded misgivings—I remember feeling very sorry for the Salvation Army.

Hitherto a source of strength, its international character seemed, in the catastrophe that had overtaken the human race, a source of weakness. The Church of England, like each of the Nonconformist churches, operated almost entirely within the shelter of one Empire, and wholly within the sanction of one patriotism. But the Salvation Army was German as well as British, French and Belgian as well as Austrian; it belonged, in fact, not only to every belligerent country, but to the neutral ones as well. In width of range it was comparable only with the Church of Rome, but (and this made all the difference) its cosmopolitan character, unlike that of the Church of Rome, had no legal safeguards, nor were its headquarters on denationalised soil. As an organism having the heart in London and arteries radiating thence all about the habitable globe, the Salvation Army seemed peculiarly at the mercy of a European war; and in imagination I saw several of the chief arteries severed and the organism left shrunken and enfeebled.

It was the easier to be fearful for the Army, I think, because of a piteous calamity that befell it

a few weeks before, when a large company of Salvationists were lost with the s.s. *Empress of Ireland*. They had been journeying to the Army's jubilee celebration in London: a unique congress that prospered exceedingly, it is true, as a demonstration of the extent to which recruits had been won among all races of the world—white, black, brown, yellow, and red. For the effort involved in thus focussing its world-wide forces, the Army had looked for a return—in the outpouring of newly generated zeal —when the delegates should have gone back to their various national spheres; but the travellers were scarcely home again before peace on earth ended, and, the chief energy of the civilised world being now directed to the slaughtering of men, the prospect looked black for a body that aimed at saving them. Nor did there seem merely abstract reasons for pessimism. While threatening to decrease the earning power of many citizens and increase the cost of commodities, the war demanded for its purposes vast present and prospective revenues compulsorily contributed to the State, and for its consequences an unprecedented volume of voluntary contributions; so that the new financial experiences of the nation, and especially the enormous drain on sources of charity, might well be expected to react injuriously on organisations which, like the Salvation Army, depended solely upon free-will offerings.

But those forebodings were ill-founded; indeed, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that facts have proved the direct contrary of surmise. Those forebodings were based on a reasoning that lacked faith, and, consequently, insight. Reviewed in the light

of developments, they are seen to have involved that, in the overruling of this planet's affairs, the old order was reversed and Evil had gained ascendency over Good—an impossibility.

The situation was this: Besides enormously increasing the sum of human suffering (and consequently the scope for human sympathy) the war had opened new fields of social service, without closing the old ones. That is to say, if there were diminished facilities for the Salvation Army, there was increased occasion for the Salvation Army. And the end—as is usual in the domain of altruism—compelled the means; the case being covered by that divine law which ensures prosperity for good works undertaken with unfaltering faith.

In other words, if, following upon the outbreak of war, General Booth and his counsellors had wrung their hands and exclaimed, "Alas! our organisation is maimed and our revenues threatened, so we must curtail our activities and refrain from any new ones"—then, most assuredly, would events have justified their fears; but, instead, General Booth and his counsellors looked calmly into the storm, and, perceiving the social problems it had occasioned (notably those associated with vast congregations of men and lads cut off from the consolation and safeguard of home ties), set about supplying solutions—with what success this little book will reveal.

And since the reader may already be generally aware of the Salvation Army's new work, in the spheres both of warfare and of war preparation, he may regard as superfluous the foregoing reflection

of early misgivings that have been so happily falsified by events. But it is fitting that the author should begin this narrative—a narrative of adventures and discoveries made among two armies on a double battlefield—in the humble, frank, and confessional spirit in which he proposes to continue it.

There were other stages of his investigations when fact proved wholly different from anticipation; nay, these pages will largely record the disintegrating influence of experience on preconceived ideas.

Not, however, that there is anything exceptional in the war having upset one's opinions about the war. And if criticism and prophecy have been so frequently at fault in the military and political spheres, much mental uncertainty, and a free indulgence in hypothesis, might perhaps reasonably be allowed to one who, leaving the beaten track, sought to study war in its psychological and spiritual—in other words, in its personal—aspect.

War to me (before and after this one broke out) was a frightful enigma; an unthinkable nightmare; a horror inconceivable. It frightened my imagination and baffled my mind. Most newspaper articles and all history books seemed to suggest that national greatness rested on a basis of determination and blows; and it had long been a commonplace of popular thought that the liberties we enjoy—whether to travel, talk, or worship—were purchased by the blood of our ancestors. Another generally asserted and generally accepted tenet was that war brings out, exercises, and indeed depends upon, the animal, or brute, side of man—the "original Adam," as it is sometimes called; which seemed so reasonable a

statement that there has been a tendency to think of one's ancestors as, in the main, folks of somewhat coarse fibre. Nay, if truth be told, have not some of us been apt to feel, in a vague sort of way, that it was a good thing our ancestors were so rough and pugnacious, as otherwise we could not be so refined and peaceful!

Then came the bewildering fact that our modern, gentle-nurtured, peaceful lads, born to civilian traditions, with no drop of military blood in their effective ancestry, were going forth by the million, with an unselfishness that seemed almost divine, to engage in the business that seemed wholly fiendish. Heretofore on the conscience of each of those lads the words had been written, "Thou shalt not kill"; now the inner mandate ran, "Thou shalt kill." Persons who thought continuously about it were in danger of thinking themselves into a state of insanity. There seemed no way of getting back to the happy tranquillity of former days except through the defeat and slaughter of legions of our fellow-creatures —a culmination in itself so contrary to the ideal of happy tranquillity that one's intelligence went sick and reeling at the bare thought of it.

For some time it was as though dark curtains had fallen around one's life; no theory appeared to fit with the appalling facts; the condition of the world had become one vast heart-breaking muddle and puzzle. In the phrase just used, Evil appeared to have assumed ascendancy over Good.

And since that attitude of mine may well be deemed, by persons of steadier faith, to have been an unwarranted lapse towards infidelity, perhaps it

may be permissible to mention, in a sort of aside, that, having retained from my teens a conviction that all war was unnecessary and wrong, and having been wont to style myself a Peace-at-any-price man, I now confronted war with no personal philosophy about it, my negative views on the subject proving wholly irrelevant to the accomplished fact.

Light sometimes reaches the human mind through strange little chinks. Try not to smile when I mention, as identified with one step in my progress towards a composed view, the surprise I felt, in the spring of 1915, on noting that primroses and violets were blooming in our woodlands as gladly as ever. A further definite advance came when I first reread the following words in the light of contemporary events: "And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be." That came like a message of comfort from Heaven; nay, it came *as* a message of comfort from heaven. "Be ye not troubled." Very well; then I need not, must not, would not, be any longer troubled at the thought of what was happening. Wars—all wars—this war "must needs be."

Then came a strong desire for personal contact with the thing which, in ceasing to be a nightmare to the imagination, had assumed deeper interest as a problem—nay, as a hundred and one problems—for the mind.

What did it feel like to be under fire? How would a physical coward (and the writer had reason to accept himself in that category) get on when the bullets are flying and the bayonets flashing? How did war affect gentle, unassuming lads who

had been brought up in a Sunday-school atmosphere? Were they put hopelessly to shame by rough youths addicted to fisticuffs and horseplay? Of what effect upon our soldiers was the sight of death occurring around them and the knowledge that death might at any moment be their portion? Was the nearness of that mortal ending equivalent in their thoughts to the nearness of God and eternity?

In particular I asked myself that last question, and could not so much as make an assured guess at the answer. But from the mere suggestion of a possibility I seemed moving towards a truer conception of war; and the personal desire to be out among the fighters and the firing, where conjecture could be put to the proof, thenceforward grew stronger day by day.

But, being a person above military age, how could I get to the Front? Nor, by the way, was it enough merely to get there. How, then, could I reach the Front with such ample facilities for moving about, and such full opportunities for frank and friendly intercourse with our lads, as would enable me to know what were the inner personal experiences?

Then came the illuminating thought: we had two armies in the field—the British Army and the Salvation Army; and how better could one study the spiritual condition of the former than from vantage points that the work of the latter would afford? Other Christian organisations were engaged among our soldiers, but I realised that, because of the simple, thorough-going, uncompromising, seven-days-a-week character of its Christianity, the Salva-

tion Army, through its corporate and individual activities in the war arena, would most surely introduce me to the knowledge I sought.

It only remains to say that General Booth most kindly gave every opportunity, both in this country and in France, for an intimate insight into the work his Army is doing; while the Imperial Government, represented more particularly by the War Office, rendered unrestricted assistance to the inquirer, not merely with facilities for visiting places of interest in the zone of the British Army, but by attaching him to a succession of battalions in the firing line, and allowing him full access to the trenches.

SOULS IN KHAKI

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIONS

A church without laity—The sailor and the spar: superlative unselfishness—In British Army camps—Salvation Army huts—Human attitudes: natural and acquired—An interview in the scullery—The Adjutant's statistics—Sausages and pathos—A Scotchman's postponed decision—The sacrifice and its sequel: testimony of the rescued sailor.

OCCASIONALLY, of course, one meets Salvationists who are not members of the Salvation Army; but, speaking broadly, what distinguishes General Booth's organisation from other parts of Christ's Church is the belief that religion, instead of being merely a matter for formal occasions and private meditation, is for every-day use and avowal. Thus it comes about that the Salvation Army is the one church without any laity, all its members being ministers, who preach their sermons not only in words, but in the way they live—and die.

The *War Cry* gives typical instances of Salvationist happenings, to one of which my attention was recalled when, as a preliminary to crossing the Channel, I was visiting Salvation Army huts in British Army camps of southern England.

It seems that, after H.M.S. *Cressy, Hogue,* and *Aboukir* had been torpedoed, two exhausted sailors, swimming about in the water, at last came upon a spar which, while sufficiently buoyant to keep either of them afloat, sank under the combined weight of both, so that they were constrained to take alternate spells of buffeting with the heavy swell and of clinging to the piece of wood—a process that could not be indefinitely prolonged, and that was terminated when one, who was a Salvationist, said "Good-bye, mate; death means life to me; but you are not converted, so keep hold and save yourself"—saying which he suffered himself to be carried away, inevitably to drown; and afterwards the other man, who survived and was rescued, reported at a Salvationist meeting the act of self-sacrifice to which he owed his life.

That beautiful abstract fact, when brought a second time to my notice, prompted a desire to see it in a framework of human nature—in other words, to find out something more about the anonymous hero who gave the highest proof of a spirit that was also revealed in the Salvation Army huts I was visiting. For those huts were administered in a spirit of brotherly love, and brotherly love reaches its golden zenith when one man gives his life for another.

A large wooden hall fitted as a shop and refreshment counter at one end, and having nearly all the rest of the space occupied by chairs and little trestle tables, methodically arranged with intervening gangways—such is the interior of a Salvation Army hut, which probably also contains a piano, a picture or

two, and a placard giving the times of trains or motor 'buses. Yellow deal being yellow deal, there is little to distinguish it from the thousand and one other huts of the camp—officers' quarters, men's quarters, messes, canteens, stores, and recreation rooms. Some of those other huts you might find full of men in khaki, just as you are almost sure to find the Salvation Army hut full of men in khaki. But it is different from them, because the person who serves at the counter, and the person who cooks the eggs and bacon, and the person who clears the tables and does the washing-up, is—well, because he or she is moved by the same motive as the man who relinquished his share of the spar.

Most of us, as is only natural, are wont to strive with a main eye to the worldly advantage of ourselves and of our families, modern existence being accepted as a competitive struggle—a sort of game of grab—for fame, fortune, and felicity; it being currently reported, not only that self-preservation is the first law of nature, but that if a man does not take his own part no one else will. The faith of the Salvationist contradicts those propositions—and he acts accordingly, with the result that his experience contradicts them also.

As for felicity, my visits to those huts introduced me to some notable examples of that state of being. There were, for instance, Adjutant and Mrs. M., whom I interviewed in the wash-house, that being the only place where a visitor could occupy a little standing room without interrupting business. For, as usual, there were about a hundred Tommies in the hut, so a good deal of cooking and serv-

ing was going on. The Salvationist couple were assisted by a Salvationist girl and a Salvationist lad, which gave the equivalent of a staff of eight under normal commercial conditions, one person who labours for love being equal to two who merely work for wages. What with selling picture postcards, frying kippers, asking a man about his invalid wife, opening tins of pineapple and helping a poor scholar to write to his sweetheart, there was a good deal doing on our side of the counter; and my interview with Adjutant and Mrs. M. was consequently jerky —two minutes with him, half a minute with her, five minutes alone with the copper.

"I tell you," cried the enthusiastic Adjutant, "I'd do anything for the boys—they're so splendid. Just to show you—our regular hours are from half-past six in the morning to half-past seven at night—and they keep us pretty busy, too, all the time, bless 'em; but often enough some will come before the proper time or after we're shut. Parties reach camp at night, you see—and they're very likely hungry after their march, poor chaps. Who could turn 'em away, I'd like to know! Same as night before last there was a knock just as I'd finished making up my books and was about to turn in. One of our regular customers had brought round a few tired lads out of a lot that had just come in; 'and *would* I mind,' he said, 'just to cook a few more sausages and give 'em a drop of tea.' Mind! of course not. And they must have passed the word back, for I'd cooked 20 lbs. of sausages before I was through—20 lbs. after closing time, mind! That day I had already cooked at least——"

But here his wife arrived breathlessly to report that eight bacon and eggs were in a hurry as they must get back to parade; and away dashed the Adjutant to see to it.

"Ah! you've no idea what fine boys we get here," the Adjutant's wife lingered to tell me; "and they're so grateful when one tries to help them, if it's only with a word of sympathy or encouragement. Being away from home, often for the first time, they miss their own women folk, and they can see I just love to mother them. Then of course there's the uniform. It's a great privilege to wear a uniform that everybody seems to have confidence in and look up to. They do feel the seriousness of what lies before them; and when they speak about the prayers they may for years have forgotten to say, and the bad ways they may have fallen into, why then I can't keep the tears back (my husband says it's so silly of me to be always crying over them—or else laughing!)—but it makes one more and more eager in pointing to the path of peace and begging those dear souls to arm themselves against all dangers by loving the Saviour who so loves them. The other day——"

But the Salvationist lass popped her head in to report a crowd at the counter; and I found myself with an opportunity to count the milk churns and packing-cases crowded about the copper.

Presently the Adjutant rushed in to remark:

"Last week we sold £14 14*s.* 3½*d.* worth of sausages. I've just had a look at my bills to see. And groceries, including bacon, come to over £15. But that's ordinary, that is. Why, the day before

Christmas we cooked 245 breakfasts! How would you like to do the washing-up for——"

"Six sausages and two eggs and bacon!" announced his wife, his disappearance being practically simultaneous with her reappearance.

"There's one dear lad I wish you could see," she exclaimed—"my Norfolk boy, I call him. You wouldn't believe how unhappy he looked when he first came here. Life was black and hopeless for him, poor lad. But now he's one of us, and so proud of his jersey, and a really beautiful influence among his comrades—I know that, because several have told me. Being a driver, you see, he's pretty well a fixture here; not like the others—always moving on. That's the worst part——" and she paused, the animation dying out of her face.

"You see a lad on the brink of decision," continued the Adjutant's wife, "and needing only a little more help and encouragement, when suddenly he moves on, probably to the Front, and you never see him again. There was one tall Scotchman—'Sandy,' we called him—who had much to conquer in his life, but he had been deeply touched, and I had seen the tears in his eyes. He seemed, in fact, on the point of kneeling at the Master's feet, and seeking the grace and guidance that never fails. One evening he got so far as to falter, 'Not to-night, but to-morrow—I think I will to-morrow.' But when the next day came his regiment was under orders to entrain that afternoon. It made us tremendously busy, and the hut was crowded with men, mostly wanting food. They kept us as busy as bees; and while I was at the counter I caught

sight of 'Sandy.' I saw him twice, and his expression seemed to say he had come intending at last to make the decision. He wanted me to go to him —I could see that, and there seemed such a pleading and disappointed look on his face. I tried to go across, and kept hoping I should be able to; but the work at the counter was absolutely unceasing, and I couldn't get away. Presently 'Sandy' sat down at the piano—he was quite a fair player—and above the clatter, I caught a few bars of 'Take time to be holy.' Thinking about it since, I can't help feeling the reproach that may have been intended."

And, wrestling with emotion, she pressed a hand against her wet eyes.

"You see," came the piteous explanation, "there I was waiting on a lot of high-spirited lads who only wanted chocolate and cake and things like that, and poor 'Sandy' may well have thought me utterly neglectful of him, whose need was so much higher. Such a number of these dear men and lads pass through one's life that it is impossible to know them by their names. In this case 'Sandy' was the only name I knew, and so it has been impossible to write to him. Still"—and the smiles came out again—"besides the failures and disappointments, one is permitted to see some beautiful results. For instance, there was a shy little R.A.M.C. boy, whom I discovered one day——"

But her husband arrived post haste to report that more sliced cake was urgently needed; which lost me further details about the shy boy, but gained me the information that, on a recent Wednesday,

the Adjutant used 11 lbs. of tea in filling goodness knows how many soldiers' quart bottles with the evening beverage, nicely milked and sugared, at 4*d.* a time.

And so the spasmodic interview ran on, the theme alternating strangely between sausages and souls, but the same spirit prevailing throughout.

Thinking about that spirit, I tried, during my second interlude with the copper, to associate what I had just seen and heard with an imaginary refreshment place established on a purely commercial basis. It was difficult to picture the salaried manager enthusiastic over the hundreds of meals he had to prepare out of business hours; his eyes brightly sparkling because, following upon a day without leisure, he was bereft of some hours of sleep by an unexpected call on his services. My imagination also rather broke down in conceiving the manager's wife openly to rejoice because she was fairly run off her feet, morning, noon, and night, and furtively to shed tears because, during a period when the pressure of work put an extra strain on her energy, she had not found it possible to do more than she had done. Nor did I have much success in picturing the two assistants, instead of being impatient for recreation and the cinema, smiling and singing snatches of songs (like the Salvation lad and lass were doing) as they put more zest into their work than most young people put into their play.

Those sprightly toilers in the Salvation Army huts had all, no doubt, been born with the natural tendency to live for themselves. But they had turned

right-about-face, and were now living for others—an impersonal mode of existence, by the by, that seemed to cause them an enduring glow of happiness. I was the more interested in these manifestations of the spirit of unselfishness because they seemed so clearly to bear—though in what way and degree did not yet appear—on those human problems of warfare which I had set out to try and solve.

Thus my desire grew for further information about the shipwrecked sailor who died so eloquent and graphic a death—further information to which, as it happened, my sausage-cooking friend pointed the way. He referred me to a Salvationist officer at Folkestone, at whose suggestion I waited on a Salvationist officer at Canterbury, by whom my steps were directed to a Salvationist officer at Sittingbourne—to wit, Adjutant Pickering, who proved to have valuable information to impart. For the beautiful incident first came to light in a neighbouring town during her command there.

"One Sunday evening in our hall at Sheerness," she explained, "there were seven or eight recent converts—Navy men—and sitting among them was a sailor named Peter Ross. I didn't know his name at the time, but I remembered seeing him the night before, when he followed from our open-air meeting to the hall. I called for personal testimonies, and one of the men who got up was Peter Ross. He said he had never thought about God in the past, nor had his people, but he wanted to give his heart to God now because of something that had happened to him. He went on to tell us (I can't re-

member the words—only the sense) that he had been on H.M.S. *Aboukir* when she was torpedoed, and that after he had been swimming about in the water for some time he came across a shipmate named Brumpton, who was a Salvationist. When feeling rather exhausted, they found a spar, which could keep one of them afloat but not both together, as it wasn't large enough. So after a bit Brumpton wished him Good-bye, and said, 'Death means life to me, but it'll be death for you if you go down without being converted; so you hold on and save yourself.' Ross said it had made a great impression on him, and he wanted his life to be different. Afterwards he told me how sorry he was that he hadn't written to his people for five years, and he gave me his sisters' address. I wrote and told them their brother had announced his conversion in our hall, and they sent me a very nice letter in reply, saying how glad they were."

So now I knew the unselfish sailor's name; and Adjutant Pickering said she believed his family lived at Southampton.

CHAPTER II

HERO AND SAINT

Soldiers and Salvationists: the link of sympathy—Affectionate cookery—A subtle attraction—Chris Lovell—Sweethearts and the penitent form—Serving in two Armies—The love of life *v.* the power of compassion—A deed of double glory—Chris's radiant death.

ONE impression deepened with each further visit to a Salvation Army hut in a British Army camp. I refer to my realisation of a unique quality in the relations existing between General Booth's people and our soldiers.

Everybody being fond of Tommy, and the Salvationist being fond of everybody, it was not at first easy to recognise a special warmth in words and smiles exchanged in the Army huts—a certain bright note of brotherliness on the part of those serving, and a certain reverent note of gratitude on the part of those served.

But the phenomenon, when once recognised, was easy to interpret.

Think for a moment about those camps. They were huge assemblies of men and lads who, at the age of early maturity—when pleasures cast their strongest spell and life is full of roses—had voluntarily abandoned all the joys that the physical world

could offer them—had withdrawn from home, family, occupation, ease, and security—to safeguard the lives and liberties of others. Each of those brown-skinned boys, with his careless laugh and healthy grin, had preferred to face danger, pain, and sudden death rather than suffer the free peoples of Europe to be dominated by military oppression. In a word, each of those unconscripted soldiers was a figure of excellent unselfishness, and as such held a passport to the hearts of all Salvationists, who, so to speak, are in the same line of business.

And here we read the secret of that bright note of brotherliness to which I have referred. The Salvationist's accustomed daily tasks lie largely among the fallen, the criminal, the suffering, and the wretched, whom he or she succours in a spirit of compassionate love. But the Salvationist waited on our Tommies—our glorious Tommies!—in a spirit of loving admiration.

The individuals previously mentioned were both actual and representative. I visited only about a dozen Salvation Army huts (out of hundreds existing in military camps and munition areas scattered throughout the United Kingdom), but I met several Adjutant M.'s and several Mrs. Adjutant M.'s. Not, mind you, that every kitchen gave off a prevailing aroma of sausages. The culinary fame of some huts was identified more particularly with fried bacon, or even fried fish.

And here, perhaps, I may mention one enthusiastic Salvationist matron whom I found cooking large brownish new-laid eggs in a huge stewing-pan, 400 at a time. Watch in hand, she was safeguard-

ing the respective rights of lightly-boiled, medium, and hard-boiled preferences; her eager pre-occupation being characteristic of Salvation Army determination to give the brave boys, not only honest value for money in the quality of all food supplied to them, but an attempted equality with mother in the way it was cooked and served. The large Salvation Army cups of tea for a penny formed an instructive contrast with the smaller cups supplied in London tea-shops for twopence halfpenny; the more so as the Salvation Army hut was under an obligation to pay its way.

With nothing done mechanically as a mere matter of routine, and with their working day including all but hours of sleep, several Salvationists whom I visited were, naturally enough, approaching the limit of their strength. Tribulation sometimes took other forms. One captain had lost his voice because, after conducting services in the crowded building, he had been compelled to spend an hour or so on the roof, during a storm of wind and rain, in closing avenues for the entry of the weather. At another hut I found a married couple who had persisted bravely with their multifarious duties while for five months their only child hovered between life and death.

But I came to the conclusion, after talking with many soldiers inside and outside the huts, that Tommy was drawn to the Salvationists, not merely or mainly because they served him with such efficiency or devotion, nor because of opportunities their huts supplied for writing, reading, and music, but because Salvationists were on the side of truth,

wisdom, and the angels, and because of their visible character as unsanctimonious saints.

Not that Tommy gave me that information in those words. "Oh, you see," he would say, "we like to go in there"—pointing to a hut bearing the familiar shield—"because the Salvation Army are —well" (lowering his voice to an inflection of gentleness), "because they are different from other people, aren't they?" Pressed to be more precise, he would at first wrestle with a condition of tongue-tied embarrassment. But gradually I groped my way to a knowledge of how the case stood—a knowledge which, in view of the angle at which I proposed to study the war, had a special interest for me. For was it not a reasonable deduction that the same lads, in their civil characters during peaceful times, would have been less open to the attraction of religion?

And so my investigations received a new stmulus, and (I being now come to a camp not far from Southampton) they took the form of seeking to hear of somebody who had known Brumpton intimately.

It seemed, however, that his acquaintances must be looked for in Portsmouth rather than Southampton; though an incidental outcome of my inquiries caused me in the first place to visit the latter town.

At the hut in question was a sunny-hearted and sunny-faced Salvationist lad who, after working all day at an office to support his mother and little brother, devoted leisure evening hours to the service of the soldiers. He was, in fact, one of those lads whose appearance suggests that the guardian angel

has overstayed the years of childhood—perhaps because not driven away by ribald talk and the reek of cheap cigarettes.

"How splendid!" he exclaimed, when I told him how Brumpton died. "I only wish I could help you to find his friends." Then, after a pause, he added: "I wonder if you would be interested to learn about Chris Lovell, a Southampton boy, whose case was rather like Brumpton's, except that Chris was in the Army and he died at the front. Miss Agnes S. in the Southampton Corps would give you the details. She was engaged to Chris."

A similar case! This was tantalising. I resolved to find out (for the lad's testimony on such a point would probably be sound) how the naval Salvationist's self-sacrifice at sea was duplicated, in spirit, by the military Salvationist's self-sacrifice on land.

And so it came about that, on reaching Southampton, I sought out Miss Agnes S., who—her eyes shining with pride and tears—told me about Chris.

And certainly the case came pat as an answer to a question which, as we have seen, was interwoven with the motive for this book. What spiritual experiences awaited our bright-eyed soldier boys innumerable, who were all in love with life, yet all prepared to die? And especially the modest, wistful, and gentle lads—how would grim war affect those who were scarcely yet acquainted with the ordinary trials of life?

Pending personal investigations at the front, I found no little significance in this case of a young Southampton cabinet-maker, who, in accomplishing

a heroic military exploit, performed a beautiful act of personal compassion.

Let me carefully review the facts:

When, three years before, Chris fell in love with that Salvation Army lass, he was the idol of his beloved mother, an attendant at St. Mary's Church, and the devoted cavalier of a toddling, chubby niece named Daisy—biographical details which probably do not suggest a dauntless warrior. There came developments even more likely to be classed as namby-pamby.

As Agnes would not forsake the Army hall, Chris took to going there himself. She told me what followed.

"One evening, without any prompting from me, he made his way from the back gallery to the penitent form, and it seemed nice that he should afterwards say, 'I was not only kneeling at the feet of Jesus, but also in a way at your feet, Aggie.' You see, as a songster I sit on the platform, and was just above him."

In his quiet way, Chris became an earnest Salvationist, without, however, figuring prominently in the Corps.

"Strangely enough, he did not become an active soldier of the Salvation Army," said Agnes, "until after joining the British Army;" and the consecrated girl, battling bravely with her personal sorrow, here produced some of Chris's letters, that she might read me extracts.

After his first Sunday at Gillingham, the newly recruited Royal Engineer wrote: "I am at every opportunity praying for you and all at home; also

for the Army. You say you hope I shall come back a Salvation soldier. I am better already, thank God; and yesterday I thought I would go for a walk, and just as I got to Chatham I heard the Army band, but I could not see it. They were playing 'Whosoever will may come,' so I had to go. It was God speaking to me, and I started running, and saw the Army, and followed them to the hall. I went in, and to-day and to-night I can say truthfully that it is well with my soul."

Later he wrote: "I went to the Gillingham hall three times yesterday. It was lovely. Last night I had three nice pals who belong to the Army. We all gave our testimony, one after the other."

From Aldershot, where he was afterwards stationed, Chris wrote to Agnes: "Yes, dear, all we must say is 'God's will be done'; and if we say that we shall be quite safe and fit to meet God. . . . Last night I saw the open-air meeting, and followed the Army to the hall. It was full of soldiers. I had the pleasure of leading a Royal Engineer to the penitent form.

"From other sources," said Agnes, "we heard of four or five more he was privileged to help in that way. One had been a deputy-bandmaster, and another, also a backslider, was a Crewe man."

A few short months and Chris was out on the front in France. There came to Agnes a letter written on the official paper of the signalling corps to which he belonged. "I am on the line now," he wrote, "but don't worry. I shall be all right. God will guide me. He has done, and will do again. It was awful here on Thursday afternoon

and night. We had a number of our men 'gassed' five times and killed. God is guiding me always. . . . I saw a trench blown up yesterday, and nearly all the men were 'gassed.' "

Note his anxiety, in the midst of death and danger, to comfort those at home.

Soon, indeed, he was enthusiastically writing to Agnes: "I've got some good news to tell you. I'm signal clerk, and I have to remain at headquarters all the time and not go into the trenches, so I hope you will not worry." And, as I was afterwards to learn, the same post brought the same consoling tidings to Mrs. Lovell, in these words: "I hope, dear mother, you are not worrying. I am quite all right. I am made signalling clerk in the signalling office."

A few days later Mrs. Lovell learnt that her son, while voluntarily discharging a duty of special importance and peril, had received a very severe wound.

"He was brought into our hospital," wrote the Rev. J. H. Martin, chaplain with the 44th Field Ambulance, 14th Division, "and we thought he was dying. But I am glad to say that he is progressing very favourably. His clean good life has been his hope, and still is. If he had been a fast-living young man your Chris would have been dead ere this. We prayed together, and he sent his love to you, and he was bright and happy."

To Agnes, Mr. Martin wrote: "All are surprised at his splendid rally. . . . Your Chris was true to his colours, and did bravely and well."

That the lad had performed an act of special

gallantry had meanwhile received a striking proof. The military authorities spontaneously telegraphed their willingness that Mrs. Lovell should immediately receive, free of charge, steamboat and railway facilities to visit her wounded boy in France. "May I go with her if I pay my fare?" asked Agnes; and when it was discovered that she and Lovell were engaged, a free pass was accorded also to her. (And my readers will the more appreciate this warm-hearted action of the War Office, because, as was current knowledge, scores of persons professionally and socially distinguished, including authors, journalists, artists, politicians, and philanthropists, were at that time vainly seeking permission to visit the western front.)

At the hospital Mrs. Lovell and Agnes learnt why Chris lay there so thin and white that at first the former (though not the latter) failed to recognise him.

It seemed that a young engineer was sent out to repair electric communications, and, if possible, cut those of the enemy; but as in the darkness he crept on across the fire-swept zone, bursting shells played havoc with his nerves, so that, having lost his way, he returned whence he had gone.

Army discipline, in such cases, must seek a middle course, no doubt, between a leniency that might encourage weakness in others and a stringency that might imperil the end immediately in view.

"Who will volunteer to go with him?" asked the officer. "It will be almost certain death." And at once Chris volunteered.

"You see, mother," was the explanation Mrs.

Lovell received from her son, "the poor chap was crying, and he was only a boy—not much more than seventeen. It was different when he didn't have to go alone. I was able to cover him; and we got through fine. After fixing up our own wire we went on and cut the enemy's."

Nor does it require much imagination to picture their long crawl across the undulations of clay. For that poor, wet-eyed boy, how reassuring the companionship of one whose cool brain would serve to locate the lines—whose foreshortened body was a shield against bullets. And, with our clues to the working of Chris's heart, who can doubt that the mainspring of his action was an impulse to succour the distraught lad?

Mother and sweetheart heard these further explanations:

"We were on our way back, and I began to think we should get through, when something possessed the boy to stand up. We were spotted at once, and out flashed the blue lights."

(For the vigilant enemy eyes an erect form might well be dimly visible against the sky, whereas crawling forms would remain unrevealed.)

"I looked up and saw the boy catch it there" (Chris indicated the neck), "and next minute I had a burning sensation in my side. It was Sunday evening, Aggie, and I thought you might just be coming out of the hall. I kept on thinking of you all. It was hours before any one could come to me."

And here we may mention facts learnt from other persons at the hospital. Chris was found on the

battlefield, fully conscious and "in an attitude of prayer." That was the phrase of the eyewitness. But one must not picture that glorious lad in any very formal attitude. His severe wound precluded anything in the nature of a kneeling posture. Nor could the joined hands have been extended. For in one he held a piece of wire (snipped no doubt from the enemy's line); in the other he still grasped his pair of pliers.

The visitors from England took Chris some fruit, and, knowing his love for flowers, they explored the French countryside until, on at last discovering a florist, they secured a bunch of choice blossoms with which to brighten his bedside. And there was a new sparkle in the unselfish lad's bright eyes as he directed the distribution of peaches, apricots, and roses among his fellow-sufferers and the nurses.

When Chris was found on the battlefield, his pockets contained only the Bible Agnes had given him (after marking the passage "Not my will but Thine be done") and his Salvationist Song-book.

"My wallet and everything else was gone," he explained; and it must remain an open question whether they fell out as he crawled along the ground or as he was being borne from the field.

(One of the missing articles, after following a roundabout route from hand to hand, found its way back some weeks later to the Lovells' home at Southampton. It was a photograph of Chris's chubby little favourite, Daisy.)

Before returning to England, mother and sweetheart received the comforting assurance that Chris would soon be sent across to Netley Hospital, where,

it was pointed out, they would be able to see much of him. Meanwhile they left him surrounded by well-wishers, including a chance acquaintance that the ladies had made under the following circumstances:

Setting out for the hospital one morning on foot, they had lost their way, and, meeting only French folk who could not understand them, were completely baffled until reaching the brow of a chalk-pit, in which English soldiers were working. Kneeling on the grass, Agnes peeped over and called out: "Tommy!" Several young fellow-countrymen were soon scrambling up in answer to that summons, and the first to reach the summit, a private in the 12th London Regiment, became their guide to the hospital, and volunteered, not only to visit Chris when they were gone, but to write and tell them how he was getting on.

Strange indeed the interwoven destinies of human beings! Chris, recovering so triumphantly from his wound, developed pneumonia and died; and it fell to the lot of the chalk-pit boy to dig his grave. That lad also sent the following account of the state in which he found Chris when the end was approaching:

"He seemed pleased with the whole world, by the expression on his face; but in his mind, poor chap, he was wandering."

A lady visitor to the hospital, who saw Chris a little earlier, wrote these details to Mrs. Lovell: "He was breathing very hard. With great difficulty he said, 'Mother was here last week.' I said, 'Yes, be brave, dear, and she may come again. God

will help you to bear up.' He said, 'Yes, I know.' He seemed to have infinite faith."

Brumpton and Chris Lovell—yes, they certainly were similar cases. Who could remain pessimistic about a war, or about anything else, in a world that produces such as they?

CHAPTER III

FAITHFUL FIGHTERS

A hero's midnight conversion—Kerbstone devotions—Instructive boxing-gloves—A peace-loving lad as a fearless fighter—Another glimpse of shipwrecked Brum: succouring the screaming boy—A cloud of Salvationist heroes—Godly men *v.* dare-devils—The faith that knows no fear—A soldier lad and his frivolous mother—Bedside prayers in the men's quarters—Half-measures resented—Why?

FURTHER facts concerning Chris were promised; but already, it will be noted, I knew far more about him than about Brumpton. However, interviews at Portsmouth soon gave me glimpses of the life and character of that glorious sailor.

"Fifteen years ago," said Mr. F. Whiteing, a Salvationist shopkeeper, "Brumpton was converted on the deck of a battleship through the efforts of Corporal Dicks. It was twelve o'clock at night, and the two knelt together under one of the big guns. Before then Brumpton had been given to drinking, fighting, and swearing. After that his chief concern was to help others to get the blessing which had transformed his life."

I wanted specific instances of the way Brumpton's influence was felt; and Jock Cummings, a dapper little Salvationist in the tailor's shop at Eastney Barracks, was able to satisfy me.

"Brum, for that's what we called him," said Jock, "was always cheerful and smiling, and as he passed to and fro in these barracks (he was one of us, you know—a Red Marine) he would often be singing some Salvation Army song. Whenever he met mates looking downhearted he would be sure to try and cheer them up. 'Don't keep your troubles,' was a favourite remark of Brum's; 'throw them into the scran-bag.' He was out and out in everything. If he was taken with the idea to pray, he'd do it, no matter where he was."

"Can you remember an instance of that?"

"Well, soon after he came back from Malta," said Jock, "he and I were walking together just opposite the cemetery in Highland Road when down he went on his knees on the edge of the pavement; and, of course, I joined him. An unusual sight that, to see two men praying (aye, and to *hear* them, too, for Brum had a powerful voice) on the kerb at about eight o'clock one summer's evening in a pretty crowded street of Portsmouth. I suppose we must have been at it for ten minutes, and about thirty people gathered round."

"Did they jeer?"

"Oh, no. There were the usual critics, of course; but Brum's gracious spirit won most of them. They could see he meant it."

"Did he have much to put up with in barracks?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary, I think. A certain amount of scoffing is what you've got to expect. But when they see a man is living true to his religion they'll mostly leave him alone. Any one new is often a little troublesome at first. But

Brum could take his own part. Once there came along a man who was a bit of a bully and given to fighting. Hearing Brum say something about salvation, the bully started calling him a 'Ummy-dum,' which is a name they've got in the service for anybody reckoned to be soft and goody-goody. After a bit he challenged Brum to come into the gymnasium; but, of course, Brum didn't want to go, and so tried to laugh it off. But the bully only kept on all the more, fancying he saw his way to some fine sport; and in the end Brum was fairly worried into putting on the gloves. As it happened he had taken lessons in boxing at Malta before his conversion; what's more, he hadn't been frittering away his strength by drinking and in other bad ways; so he was more than a match for the other man. But, to begin with, Brum took a little punishment; then he got to work in earnest. It wasn't many minutes before the bully had had quite enough. 'Hm!' he muttered, as he nursed his poor bruised face, 'do you call that salvation?' 'No, mate,' replied Brum, 'that's correction. We'll talk about salvation now.' And at once he began."

And so Brum was revealed as physically strong and a fighter—the sort of man who is endowed by nature with traditional qualities of the hero. I wondered if perhaps Chris were not just such another robust specimen of manhood. True, a contrary impression had been left upon my mind by the information already forthcoming; but that impression was now seen to have insufficient warrant.

Thus, on visiting Mrs. Lovell at Southampton, I was concerned to ascertain if, as between her son

and the sailor, there had existed an identity of temperament to correspond with an essential similarity in the manner of their dying. But photographs of Chris suggested a sensitive, gentle, and diffident lad; while a letter from his employers—the Southampton cabinet-maker for whom he had worked since leaving school—contained the following passage: "Your dear boy did his duty in face of being really a very peace-loving young man. It is all to his credit. I know that he was very God-fearing."

This evidence, however, if it destroyed one hypothesis, provoked another. Since the lad was so obviously of a mild and unaggressive character, might not his act of superb self-sacrifice have resulted merely from impulse—the unconsidered prompting of a happy moment? But to another son of Mrs. Lovell, Chris's officer wrote: "I have known your brother well for a long time, and he was under my command from the time we embarked until I was 'gassed' on June 30. He was always an excellent soldier, and his behaviour under fire was a credit to his (or any) corps. He was always cheerful even under the most trying conditions, and there are very few of whom I can say the same."

So that slender success attended attempts to trace an analogy between the character of the hero and the character of his deed. It merely seemed that the gentle cabinet-maker was differentiated from the muscular marine by a quality of chivalrous compassion for youth. But even this modest deduction did not survive a conversation with Sergeant Barnes, who in barracks was in charge of the company to which Brum belonged.

"A fine, straight man Brumpton was," exclaimed the sergeant; "and, mind you, that's the word of one who's in a position to know—nobody better. For it's part of my duty to watch the men under me, and there's not a great deal any one can do or say in barracks but gets noticed. What's more, when you've got twenty-eight men living together by themselves inside of four walls, you're not exactly dealing with a Sunday-school; and if anybody in a crowd like that starts out to live same as your pal, he's taken on a big job—no mistake. But Brumpton kept to his course, straight and true. And, mind you, I'm a different sort of man myself—I've got to admit it. But I want to say right out that he lived up to what he claimed to be. If there was bad language going about, he'd be up and put in his word against it, no matter if it was an officer or anybody else. Same as myself, when I might have spoken a bit too free, he'd step right up to me—quite respectful, mind; you couldn't well take any offence—and just say he thought I'd have different words in my mouth if I gave the matter more thought. Yes; while he did his duty in the service as good as the next man, your people can take it from me that his ways of carrying on here would have come up to all they could have expected of him."

And gradually I realised that the honest sergeant assumed that I was endeavouring to ascertain, on behalf of the Salvation Army, whether Brumpton had or had not lived consistently as a Salvationist.

"Did you hear of the way he behaved in the water?" I asked, "when his ship was torpedoed?"

"Aye," replied the sergeant; "some of the survivors came back here after it happened, and they brought us news of Brumpton. He and six others got on a bit of a raft—five being men who told us about it, and the other a lad who'd gone funny in his head by the shock. It seems this lad was screaming, and wouldn't stay quiet in one place, so he had the raft capsized twice. In fact, he carried on so off the level that it didn't give the others a fair chance, and what with his screams and one thing and another, they'd soon had enough of it. So, being good swimmers, they sheered off to look for a quieter berth. But they couldn't persuade Brumpton to go with them. He wasn't going to leave that crazy youngster. So the five came away by themselves and got picked up, an hour or so afterwards, from an upturned boat they soon sighted. But that was the last news they could give us of poor Brumpton—seeing him still on the raft and trying to coax the crazy lad to be quiet. What happened after that nobody knows——"

"But," I interposed, "are you sure we are speaking of the same man? I have heard very different details of Brumpton's death."

"Yes, yes," replied the sergeant, "there was only one Brumpton. I knew him well. And these men I'm telling you about—Carter, Fish, and the others —served in my company, same as he did. Most likely you heard about him giving up for another man when there wasn't support for two. That's the bit that got into the papers. I didn't have the facts first-hand, but it'ud be just like Brumpton to

do a thing like that. Several were saying the other was a man named Peter Ross."

"But," I pointed out, "there doesn't seem any connection between the two accounts."

"Neither is there," replied the sergeant. "A tidy time would have gone by between the one affair and the other. What became of the daft boy nobody could say. Very likely him and Brumpton got aboard the *Cressy,* and then, when she was torpedoed, they'd be thrown in the water again, only of course they'd have parted company before that. It was a mixed-up affair, the three cruisers being blown up one after the other; and a good many survivors from one got aboard another, and then had a further dose when she was hit."

And so we have a second glimpse of Brum in the area of catastrophe and death, and in that second glimpse we again see him sacrificing himself for another. Indeed, the more deeply I have probed my two cases, the more impressive were the facts that came to light respecting them. Another tendency was for new facts to emphasise the difference in temperament between Brum and Chris and the similarity of spirit that controlled their actions.

Not that it was possible to associate a supreme manifestation of that spirit with these two in particular. The bent of my inquiries being noted, I now heard on all hands of other Salvationist soldiers and sailors who, on specific occasions, had either given or risked their lives for comrades. Never did I visit a Salvation Army corps without learning that some of its members, returning home on a few days' leave, had testified from personal ob-

servation to acts of heroism and self-sacrifice performed by Salvationist chums. Again and again I heard of Salvationists on land and sea whose gallantry, unlike that of Brum and Chris, had been so conspicuous as to win awards from the authorities. Tidings reached me of towns beflagging themselves, and according civic welcomes, in honour of Salvationist privates and N.C.O.'s who had won the D.C.M. or other distinction.

By following up a small proportion of those cases, I could have filled this book twice over with stories such as those of Brum and Chris. Especially tempting were some of the possibilities that opened before me, as, for instance, the following extract from a letter written by Sergeant Mitchell (a soldier of the Blackwood Salvation Army corps), who had received a D.C.M.:

"The old saying that to win battle honours you have to be a kind of dare-devil is false, and it has been amply proved so in this war. It is the men of God who have come out on top. It was Christ in me and for me that enabled me to do what I did."

But I could spare no more time for initial investigations, especially as the facts already elicited showed that the devout Christian, because he was a devout Christian, faced danger unafraid, in no wise concerned for his own safety, but full of solicitude for the safety of others. On entering the battle arena he lived triumphantly in the spirit, having risen superior to the flesh.

We know how readily faith will flicker during trivial trials of daily life; which made more re-

markable the proof that, under the supreme, death-facing test, faith burnt bright and steadily.

My immediate interest now shifted from Salvationists to the others—to the massed thousands marching and drilling on the verdant undulations; to those men and lads who, while the glory of an absolute self-sacrifice rested upon all, were otherwise a miscellaneous host representing all groups of the Christian Church, all degrees of piety, and all shades of unbelief and of indifference to religion. At least, they had been thus widely divergent in civil life. What of them now?

Was I not already discerning indications that, by so nobly volunteering to face death for the sake of others, those men and lads had won their entrance into a mental realm where the factors of mortal existence stood revealed with a new distinctness?

Nor in this connection can I forbear from repeating what was said to me, at that time, by the woman officer of a North London Salvation Army corps.

"Early in the war," she said, "a great many young fellows of this neighbourhood, including all our big lads, went as soldiers; and there hasn't been a single week-end lately but one or more of them, being home on leave, have turned up at our meetings. They were splendid before, but they are still more splendid now. Of course in some cases their experiences have been terrible, but one can't help seeing that they have come through the awful trial with new strength and a new steadfastness—yes, and with a new sweetness in their smiles. In fact, I don't grieve over our brave soldiers. They seem happy and safe. The worst tragedy, I often feel, is here at

home. Look at the crowded public houses! Look at the overflowing cinemas! Look at the newspapers, with their two leading features side by side—one half of the page devoted to the slain and accounts of the terrible fighting, with the other half given up to finery and fashions for women!"

But I am quoting this lady in view of the narrative to which those remarks led her.

"A few evenings ago," she said, "a lad living near here (not a Salvationist, by the way) arrived home rather unexpectedly from the firing line. He found a party in progress, with his mother in evening dress, with wine on the sideboard, and with all the company in boisterous spirits. The lad, who had never been away from his people for so long before, had been longing for that homecoming; but I can understand his disappointment at finding a house full of noisy people in place of the quiet domestic privacy he had pictured. After the scenes he had just come from, one can understand how hard he found it to adapt himself to the frivolous gathering. But it seems he struggled on fairly well until, something being said about the theatre tax, his mother exclaimed: 'Oh, this horrid war! it does so interfere with our pleasures, doesn't it?' Then the boy broke down and half sobbed: 'Oh, mother, mother, why can't you understand?' "

But more important (because of general application) was the evidence yielded by my continued visits to the huts.

Several times mention was made of what befell Salvationists when, before going to bed in their crowded camp quarters, they knelt to pray. It

is not surprising that here and there a lad, arriving tired and perhaps dispirited among new companions, should be so oppressed by vulgar, and sometimes obscene, talk going on around him that he refrained from any outward manifestation of his devotions; nor that such a one, dissatisfied with the compromise of secret prayer, should, on the second or third night, gain courage openly to kneel in the sight of all his comrades. And since it seemed that he always provoked a storm of jeering, sneering, and mocking, one felt uncertain which act of the young Salvationist showed a finer courage —that of enlisting in King George's army or that of revealing himself a soldier of Christ. There were, of course, those other Salvationists—the majority—who publicly prayed on the first night as on all others; and the evidence was general that they not only escaped persecution, but won their way to a position of great influence in the hut.

"You see," said one Salvation Army officer, "if a man is true to his colours from the outset, all goes well. But there must be no faltering; the other men object strongly to that. They respect any one who is thorough in his religion, but they don't like half measures."

Other Salvation Army officers said the same, and it never occurred to me to question their deduction, which seemed to have full authority from the facts; though certainly, with one's sympathies so readily engaged by the human frailty of diffident and sensitive youths, it was not easy to see why Tommy should feel called upon to supervise, and with a

drastic hand control, the forms taken by the religion of other persons.

But it came to light that the deduction was so incomplete as to be misleading. The truth dawned upon me by stages.

I heard of several significant cases, including that of Corporal Humphries, whose military duties held him for some months at a camp in the Aldershot district.

"Corporal Humphries exercises a wonderful influence on the men," said the officer in charge of the local Salvation Army hut. "He commands respect not only among those in his own hut, but over a very wide circle beyond. The men consult him in their difficulties and defer to his judgment. Last New Year's Eve they paid him a much-appreciated compliment in the way they celebrated the occasion. They told him beforehand they had had things all their way up till then, so they were going to let his ideas have a show for once. And when the celebration took place it was scrupulously teetotal, no man touching a drop of liquor all the evening. You see how the soldiers are influenced by a man when his religion is seen to be thorough and uncompromising."

And my informant went on to mention further facts that were specially illuminating.

"After a while," he said, "another Salvationist came to those quarters—a lad from the north. There was nothing to show he was a Salvationist, nor did the two get in touch with one another at first; but somebody found out, and word must have been passed round among the thirty or forty

other men. That night, soon after he had gone to bed, Corporal Humphries heard a disturbance at the other end of the hut; and, thinking his services might be useful as a peacemaker, he went to see what was amiss. But he was practically waved on one side, and the men said: 'You are all right; we have nothing to say against you. But if anybody else calls himself a Salvationist here, he must act straight. It's got to be one thing or the other; we don't want any half-and-half chaps in this hut.' Then it turned out that, being afraid of ridicule, the young Salvationist had not knelt by his bedside to say his prayers. The poor fellow had a lot of rather rough criticism to listen to, and it took him some time to live down that first mistake, for which he made no attempt to hide his shame and penitence. However, being a thoroughly sound young chap at heart, he ultimately won his comrades' respect and confidence in a marked degree."

It seemed obvious to me that the young Salvationist had not been called to book in any mere spirit of mild horseplay. Whence, then, the British Army's anxiety that its representatives of religion should be above reproach? To this question an answer was suggested by the following remarks of a Salvationist officer in a Kentish camp:

"Quite a number of our lads in the ranks," he said, "come and report themselves here. They help with our open-air services. But their most useful work, I think, is in the quiet influence they are able to exercise over their comrades. It is not limited to private conversations. A fine young fellow told me he was sitting on his bed reading his Bible

when several gathered round, and one said, 'Don't keep it all to yourself, lad. If you read it aloud we can all hear.' He had quite a good audience as he read several chapters; and, after that, Bible readings in the hut became a regular thing, the lad often being called upon to explain passages. I heard of another Salvationist who, when getting up from his knees one evening, was asked if he would mind praying for them all; and from that date a short prayer-meeting, led by the Salvationist, often took place before they turned in."

I began to see signs that to the heroes who were ready to fight and die—at any rate to a large proportion of them—religion had become an immediate personal interest.

CHAPTER IV

ARRIVAL IN FRANCE

Civilian khaki—Repressed emotion at Victoria—Officers and their relatives—The mother: an incident—Thoughts on the train—Innocent hypocrites—The smell of the sea—An emotional reaction—High spirits afloat—England in France—A town's tribulation—Red Cross work: dramatic night scene—Unloading a hospital train—Smiles from a Salvation Army ambulance—Depressing stretcher cases—Instructive sitting cases—Thrilling fortitude.

With Foreign Office co-operation, the War Office put in motion certain delicate machinery to ensure that, along our front in Flanders, the non-official civilian should have a footing and facilities; and early one morning I repaired to Victoria Station in clothes which, while not a khaki uniform, were (in accordance with influential instructions) of a cut and complexion generally to resemble such a uniform when viewed from afar.

Well before the whistle blew, our train was crowded (mainly with British officers) far beyond its seating capacity. The platform was thronged with mothers, fathers, wives, sweethearts, sisters, and little brothers.

Moments of tense ordeal were passing. For artificial jauntiness rings more tragically than unre-

strained sobbing, and a piteous element of grimace enters into the smile that is attempted in defiance of a breaking heart. Less of an emotional strain attends the entraining of troops, when poor old mothers blubber outright, and no relative is ashamed of streaming eyes. But breeding and class involve strange obligations; and at the departure of the officers' train there was a conspiracy to deny grief the solace of tears.

A little chap in an Eton suit, his lips and chin quivering, bravely saluted Daddy good-bye with a small hand raised smartly to position. Several of us were crowding within the entrance to a Pullman coach, our feet hemmed in by sprawling luggage.

Already there was the first tremor of movement in the train, and a young Lieutenant, as a preliminary to joining us, had just kissed his mother farewell.

They were a notable couple—his sensitive features conveying a suggestion of birth and social position which the tasteful simplicity of her dress confirmed. Equal to all trials is the quiet self-control which belongs to the traditions of patrician blood. To all trials? No; not quite all.

See! Her arms suddenly outstretch and in frantic abandonment are flung round him. The seconds tick out as with head bowed he is locked immovable in that crushing embrace. Twenty years have passed in a flash, and still the precious infant head is resting on her breast. But all is now at an agonising end. For (as the action so vividly reveals) her heart has told her that she will never see him more —that during the weary years to come she will feed,

ravenous and unsatisfied, on the memory of that last sensation of having his shoulder and warm neck pressing against her hands and bosom.

The train has advanced less than a couple of yards. He is now safely on the steps, his head still drooping, his face ashen. But he need not suppose that the others are watching him. Poor lads! all their faces are dull and still. With each it has been a mother, a father, a sweetheart, or some one—nay, with many it was a group of dear ones.

For those boys, at that moment, existence had become divided into two contrary phases—the golden past of honeysuckle, laughter, and happiness; the leaden future of bullets, blood, and grim uncertainty.

It deepened one's sense of the contrast that we should be running through the grey region of South London roofs—an experience ironically suggestive of the beginnings of former holidays, spent either on our healthy seashore or among the bright interests of the Continent. We stared out of window with fixed eyes and set lips.

How grievously changed was the world! France—Belgium—no longer do thy names suggest sunny gaieties, but, instead, blows, wounds, and groaning. We are bound for a carnival, not of flowers and frolic, but of death and destruction.

The remorseless train was hurrying us towards the war—hurrying that boy farther and farther from his mother, who already, it might be, deaf to those assisting her along the platform, was staring with fearful eyes into the blank future. Sore, indeed, her present plight—unless she knows there are angels

in Heaven. Let Pity stretch sheltering wings over those who have sought to anchor their lives to earthly joys, which, as the train speeds south, are seen to have no permanence. Happy they who have thrown beyond this world those moorings of love and faith that hold fast now and always. For on that journey from Victoria Station one realised anew that things of the earth melt like vapour, while only the things discerned by spiritual senses are solid and enduring rock.

There was some lightening of the mental burden as we reached suburban gardens, with their comforting green, their reassuring blossoms. The subalterns have lit their cigarettes, concerned to convince one another that nothing is amiss—and all the while omitting to laugh and smile. O innocent hypocrites! Senior officers, for whom this is a return journey, confer earnestly together, striving to revive an interest in trenches, shells, and night attacks, and so shut off mental pictures of sweet, wistful faces floating through recent scenes in home surroundings.

Having piled our kits in a recess, a number of us stood jammed together in a corridor; but before the train had reached open country, a friendly attendant, having contrived a makeshift seat in the car, came and singled me out for the privilege of sitting on it. Nor—being, as would seem, fraternally minded towards the solitary civilian—would he tolerate my reluctance to profit by such favouritism. So, besides being soothed by an act of human kindness, I now surveyed the scene from a position of physical ease.

But that railway journey continued to be a dull ordeal, and I think everybody was relieved when, upon the train stopping at a pier lashed by grey waves, we found occupation for our minds and muscles in swarming, luggage-laden, through turnstiles and formalities towards the steamboat.

The smell of the salt sea—always incense in the nostrils of Young England—gave the finishing touch to an emotional reaction; I found myself in the midst of compressed lips, buoyant footsteps, and shining eyes. The lads in leather and khaki had now found their voices, which rang with animation.

So that already was I being instructed by the experience which corrects surmise. A depressing opening had, at the time, seemed to spread its baneful influence like an evil prophecy over the great adventure of going to the war; for—as we novices might be excused for reasoning—if all looked so grey at the start, how increasingly dark would we not find things on proceeding towards our goal, which was like to prove black indeed!

Fallacious reasoning, of course—as was shown by that enthusiastic embarkation.

In the highest spirits, then, our enthusiastic lads were going forth to face perils incurred for other people's sake. And, after all, had not their earlier oppression meant nothing but an impersonal sorrowing for Mother, Dad, and the others? With the door now shut on that domestic episode, the self-sacrificing boys confronted only their own risks; and, consequently, they were supremely content.

When you come to think of it, how could those voluntary defenders of freedom be anything else

but happy? Though we so constantly misjudge the evidences, eternal justice runs through all human affairs.

With the voyage begun, nobody (unless ruled out by a sea-sick tendency) could resist the contagion of our young fellows' exaltation; and I, for one, certainly never crossed the Channel with my senses tuned to a keener appreciation of the experience.

A blustering wind was blowing, and great grey waves swung across our course; as was all in key with the occasion. Note, moreover, two picturesque facts belonging to the war; namely, the universal putting-on of life-belts, and the sight of our naval escort nosing her powerful way through the smoking crests.

On deck it was my good fortune to fall in with several hearty British Columbians who had donned the khaki; and, clinging to handrails, we talked enthusiastically of Canada until the heaving boat reached her destination.

Then we entered a town which was of double interest because occupied by two peoples. A temporary British nationality had been superimposed on a permanent French nationality. The women, children, and shopkeepers were native, while the visiting population figured conspicuously as khaki pedestrians strolling along the pavements, khaki squads busy at the docks, and khaki columns marching through the streets to camps on neighbouring heights.

One is accustomed to think of anxiety and sorrow as of merely individual or family concern; and though a son be maimed, or the breadwinner lies dead on his bed, the community is wont to pursue

its unheeding life through normal channels of business, pleasure, and frivolity. But here one found a town in tribulation, with its Casino, hotels, and various other institutions turned into hospitals.

Traversing the principal thoroughfares with a Salvation Army Adjutant, I became vaguely aware that, for the time being, this French town's chief industry was the care of sick and wounded English soldiers. But at night that knowledge was burnt upon my heart by a series of vividly pathetic scenes belonging to the great world drama.

The evening was far advanced when, returning from Salvation Army quarters established on a suburban eminence, I was being driven down into the town, which, as a precaution against air attacks, was wholly unillumined. But, at a bend in the road, suddenly we saw, moving slowly far below, three pairs of white lights, which shone like the eyes of huge unseen dragons crawling across a valley of darkness.

"Motor ambulances," explained my companion (who, as it happened, superintended the large fleet of Salvation Army ambulances operating in the British war zone). "A hospital train," he added, "has just arrived from the front."

Judging by their course, those pairs of lights had crossed the harbour bridge and were entering main thoroughfares. Behind them, two other pairs of lights now were visible.

As we drew nearer, and caught glimpses of the commanding size of those vehicles, my imagination was more and more impressed by the significance of their gentle pace, affording, as it did, so striking

a contrast with the thumping clatter and headlong speed to which modern motors have accustomed us. It was pathetic to see them, with abated power and muffled noise, creeping so deliberately through the deserted streets. And the bright illumination they cast upon the roadway—there was something very touching in that flagrant violation of the law of darkness. Air risks were clearly of less moment than the necessity to ensure for the ambulances a smooth and unobstructed course. Besides, if a raiding aeronaut beheld those slow-moving lights, would not his right arm be paralysed by pity?

Every few minutes saw an addition to the number of double gleams in the piteous procession.

My companion, having explained that the train would not yet be nearly unloaded, agreed to take me to the railway terminus, so that I might see the wounded at close quarters. Accordingly, after crossing the bridge, we were soon alighting from our little car, which was left to await our return in the roadway it monopolised. For there, as elsewhere, the town at that late hour was a solitude.

As we walked across the empty courtyard, I recalled that, a stranger to the sight of newly wounded men, I had a name for being easily unnerved in the presence of calamity and suffering. Added to the memory of turning away, faint and shuddering, from street accidents, was the recollection of this recent comment from a little boy: "Well, *you're* a nice one to be going to the war! Why, the other day when I cut my finger you turned quite pale."

So, as we passed through the booking hall, I took the precaution of warning the Adjutant:

"Please don't mind if I'm a bit upset, and make an exhibition of myself, when we see the poor chaps."

Walking towards an illumined part of the station, we soon came upon the hospital train—a train of specially constructed coaches which, long and lofty, shone with electric light, white paint, and cleanliness. Besides a corridor entrance at either end, each coach had central sliding doors, which, having been run back, gave us such view of the interior as revealed tiers of bunks aligned on both sides. Along the central gangway moved nurses (offering their ministrations here and there among the bunks) and figures in khaki—*i.e.* an occasional doctor, a few dressers, and a number of bearers. From one of the bunks a burdened stretcher would be lifted and carried by two bearers to the open doorway, there to be carefully received by another pair of bearers standing on the platform. By them, after they had rested it on the ground and adjusted their positions, the stretcher was borne slowly away to another part of the station.

Standing beside one of the coaches, I glanced at many stretchers without seeing more than recumbent, still forms covered by blankets. Each head was sunk in a pillow, and—the night being chilly—a blanket was drawn up to the chin. Beyond one glimpse of a deathly white cheek and temple, bordered by wet and glistening hair, I saw none of the faces. Bandages round several heads were visible.

We walked along the platform and watched identical streams of stretchers slowly issuing from other coaches. It continued to be the rule that the cases lay inert, whether in the train or in transit. Ex-

ceptions to that rule were (1) arms moving on a stretcher that passed me, and (2) glimpses I caught of tobacco smoke arising from a bunk on a train. Otherwise those scores and scores of stricken men and lads lay motionless—all the vigour of their young manhood dwindled to helpless, unmoving figures swaddled in blankets. For the sake of his country, each had risked a mangled body—and incurred it.

There seemed something appropriate in all this occurring at night, when nobody was about. The great drama of a world-wide war was being enacted in public; but here, I felt, we were having a peep behind the scenes. It lent a special grimness to the occasion that the bearers should perform their office with hushed voices, soft footsteps, and grave faces.

Tragedy is dumb show; warfare without any redeeming touch of animation—it was indeed a gloomy scene.

We entered that unending stream of silent men carrying their piteous burdens, and came presently to an exterior length of roofed pavement which bordered an area of roadway where many motor ambulances had assembled. A long line of them had backed against the kerb, where, with their hangings drawn aside, they stood ready to receive the stretchers.

Meanwhile the arriving cases were subjected to individual scrutiny, an officer putting some question to each, bending low to catch the reply, and, where none was forthcoming, consulting a label attached to the patient's clothing. Information thus acquired

was imparted to seated clerks who were keeping, or checking, a register; and every case was allocated to a suitable hospital, indicated in the choice of ambulance communicated to the bearers.

Standing on the pavement, I found myself scrutinising the nearest ambulance, which wanted one more case to complete its complement; and while my eyes were fixed on that grim interior, so suggestive of helplessness and suffering, an incident occurred that went far to relieve the tension of my thoughts and give me a sounder insight into the passing scene.

There was a movement in one of the upper bunks, and, with the aid of elbows, a lad raised himself into a half-sitting posture and looked about him with a face of healthy colour lit up by cheerful curiosity.

Here obviously was a boy engaged on a wonderful adventure. The enlistment, the training, the fighting, the wound, the railway journey—everything, so far, had been delightfully interesting (his expression seemed to indicate this), and now he was all agog to know where he had got to and what was going to happen next.

Incidentally, I dare say, he wondered who in the world I could be, standing there and staring so hard; but anyway he gave me a nod and a smile which, as has been hinted, were not only human and friendly, but reassuring and instructive.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Adjutant, on rejoining me after reporting to an officer what were my credentials and business, "so I see you are inspecting one of our ambulances"—whereupon, glancing at the side

of the vehicle, I saw it was inscribed "The Salvation Army"—words which somehow seemed in key with the happy look on the face of the wounded lad.

"Suppose we now go and see the sitting cases," added the Adjutant. "For, you know, the wounded are divided, from the ambulance point of view, into two classes—stretcher cases and sitting cases. Serious injuries, as well as slight injuries, are found in both groups. A man may be badly hit in the body, arms, or head, and yet be able to walk; in which case he will travel as a sitter. On the other hand, a man's wound may be unimportant and yet so situated that it is impossible or inadvisable for him to use his feet, so he becomes a stretcher case."

Proceeding to another part of the station, we almost immediately happened upon one of the most pathetic and impressive sights that my eyes have ever beheld. It was a motionless, irregular queue of muddied, unkempt, wounded men—men whose injuries had been washed and dressed behind the firing line, but whose condition otherwise was that in which they had left the trenches.

The Adjutant said most of them would have been wounded since I arrived in France. In other words, when, a few hours before, I was travelling down from Victoria, they were strong and hearty, bearing arms, with elastic footsteps, expanding lungs, and buoyant spirits. Now they were shattered, limp, and feeble invalids.

Without rifles, or haversacks, or belts; in torn, cut, dirty, half-unbuttoned tunics; with bandaged heads and arms in slings; with faces drawn and pale from shock and loss of blood—there stood some

scores of Great Britain's defenders, in an aspect the more noble because lacking every outward symbol of nobility. To look at them, those stricken champions of freedom might almost have been a string of squalid tramps.

By what a strangely ironic fate they were standing there all alone in that spacious railway hall, when millions of British men and women, with hearts full of love and gratitude, would have deemed no trouble too high a price for the opportunity of acclaiming, thanking, and serving them.

We all know our wounded lads at the later stage of blue suits, their faces testifying to soap and water, happiness, and restored health. It was a higher privilege to see them at that early stage, when their glory seemed the greater for their grime.

While we stood there, the queue resumed its progress, which proved somewhat sluggish, many footsteps dragging heavily. A tall man with bandaged eyes groped with outstretched hands, assisted by guiding pressure from a left-arm casualty walking beside him.

Proceeding in the opposite direction, we came to the train's foremost section, where sitting cases had alighted from ordinary first-class coaches. Retracing our steps, and proceeding in the other direction, we came to an area of roadway where those cases were accommodated in motor omnibuses.

And thus we realised the great advantage, in an economy of ambulance space, which sitting cases possessed over stretcher cases; nor, obviously, did our unselfish lads begrudge the deprivation of ease involved in the alternative.

Nay, thinking about the demeanour of those lads, and reflecting that they showed no impatience at their mode of travelling, I began to marvel that they showed no impatience under a far heavier provocation. For it suddenly occurred to me that, though they were suffering the pain, aches, nausea, and heightened temperature resulting from wounds and shocks, yet I had heard no moan, groan, or word of lamentation escape from one of them. Nay (for I walked along a further queue to find out) those fine fellows neither uttered any sound of complaint nor bewailed their lot by look or gesture.

Unselfishness had provided a great opportunity for fortitude. The tragedy was swallowed up in glory.

CHAPTER V

VISITING THE WOUNDED

In a transformed Casino—The man of many wounds: a smile framed by lint—Captors of the Bluff—Irrepressible invalids—Map-making on a bed quilt—Heroes in their teens—A blushing British soldier—"We young chaps are just as brave"—Cuddling the Bible: a story left untold—A man without hands—The Salvationist lass and the cigarette—Studies in gratitude—At the Canadian hospital—Death-bed rapture—Looking into a mother's eyes—Gasping and chatting—A letter to Aunty—Salvationist sisters: welcome friends and messengers—Unselfish crusaders meet.

GOING next morning, with two Salvationist sisters, to visit the Casino, I stood in a tiled corridor before great glass doors—on the threshold of new experiences.

A clean, bright foreground of beds and whiteness and pillowed heads, with busy nurses in dainty uniforms, the atmosphere charged with sunshine and iodoform, while, visible through the encircling windows, was a background of sea and sky in two glorious shades of blue—such was my impression of the whole. But soon I was looking at a part.

Three nurses were bending over a bed. Having just covered the patient's right foot, they removed and replaced bandages that swathed his left knee; then, after attending to a chest wound, they redressed areas of flesh on the lower part of one

arm and the upper part of the other; at the conclusion of which task one nurse proceeded to treat the right hand, and the other two nurses departed, leaving me with an unobstructed view of the man's head, which was enveloped in bandages save for a circular space that left his eyes, nose, and mouth uncovered.

And this is the amazing fact to which I am leading: a sustained merry smile was framed within that round hole cut in the white mask.

Please note that the war was producing phenomena which flatly contradicted ordinary experience. It is a matter of common knowledge that lacerated flesh and broken bones cause physical suffering, which finds expression in moaning, ejaculations, and grimaces. Yet overnight I had seen hundreds of wounded men who, without exception, were complacent; and here we found smiles on the lips of a man who was injured in head, body, and all his limbs—perchance the man of fifteen wounds who was so tenderly conveyed in a Salvation Army ambulance.

We pushed open the great glass doors and entered. The Salvationists at once visited beds in a row skirting the left-hand wall. Other rows ran in other directions, and for a moment I stood looking about me, uncertain in which direction to proceed. Then my gaze met that of a brown-skinned man whose friendly eyes as good as asked me to go and talk to him.

"Hullo, old chap, and how are you?" next minute I was blurting out, not having bethought me of suitable words wherewith to greet a wounded compatriot met in hospital on foreign soil.

"Fine, thanks. How's yourself?" he replied, and then rattled on: "I say, d'you know we took the Bluff! Talk about a neat job—why, inside twenty minutes all the fighting was over, and we'd won back what we'd held before and more trenches besides. We fairly took 'em by surprise, and up went their hands. 'Mercy! Mercy! Camerade!' they cried."

He hardly gave himself time for coherent articulation, and soon it was as though, in his eagerness, he had found a means of pouring forth two streams of detail at one and the same time. But I turned to find that the supplementary information was coming from a man in the next bed.

"Some of the boys," he was exclaiming, "went right on—farther than they ought, in fact. But they were wild with delight to be out on the top for once. We had got our chance at last, and we made the most of it. You see, the 'International' trench goes this way"; and, having struggled into a sitting position, he began a little map-making on the bed quilt.

By which time the infection had spread to his neighbour on the other side.

"That's right," exclaimed the third enthusiast. "We've stopped their enfilading fire. It came from a circular trench on the left. But that's in our hands now."

Of course I gave them a good scolding.

"The idea of exciting yourselves like this! Don't you know that you are wounded, and that you are invalids, and that you've got to keep quiet? You lie down at once, sir."

Thus admonished, the worst offender wriggled

back, somewhat shamefaced, into a recumbent position.

"Where did you get hit?" I asked, while adjusting the bedclothes about his shoulders.

"Two in the left leg," he humbly replied.

"Anything in the paper about our fight?" coaxingly inquired my oldest friend in the group.

"Yes," I admitted, "a lot. And everybody is tremendously proud of you. Still," I sternly added, "you're not to think any more about it. Fill your minds with pleasant thoughts and get well as soon as possible—that's your present job."

It chanced that, while I was uttering these homilies, my eyes alighted on an attractive, smiling face in a row of beds some way off. Instinct took me to that face, which, from being youthful in the distance, became downright boyish near at hand.

"But," was my involuntary exclamation, "surely you are not eighteen?"

"I am *now*!" he beamingly replied.

"Yes, but when you joined——!"

"Oh, well," he replied, brazening it out, "I didn't want to miss the chance—and, you see, I was strong for my age—and, and, well, I knew I'd be eighteen in ten months' time."

"And how long have you been in hospital?" For his high spirits hinted at convalescence.

"We only came in last night."

"I say," exclaimed an exuberant voice behind me, "do you know we've taken the Bluff? Isn't it simply ripping!"

Turning, I beheld, on the next bed, a still more juvenile face.

"Why, you naughty boy!" I exclaimed. "What are *you* doing in the British Army?"

Whereupon (partly because of the irregularity of his attestation, but mainly from sheer gratification) that wounded British soldier blushed.

If only his mother and his father could have seen him! Ah, if all the mothers and fathers could but see their wounded, undaunted darlings—young Britain in arms for liberty, yet still with silky down above its laughing lips!

I could not forbear leaning over him and whispering, as a sort of message from the mothers and fathers of our Empire:

"You brave, *brave* little boy."

"Oh, well," he replied, with shining eyes, "the men say we are just as brave as they are. And we *are,* too!"

Here one of the Salvationist sisters came, and, drawing me aside, said:

"There's a man over there who is holding a Bible, and he says it saved his life. I don't know in what way he means, but I thought you would like to hear his story. Then do you see that last case on the next line to this? He does so appreciate having somebody to talk to, and if you could spare him a little time he says he would be ever so grateful. I stayed as long as I dared, but the others think it's rather unkind if one doesn't save a little time for them. The poor chap has lost both hands, and, I'm afraid, cannot recover."

"I say," exclaimed the senior lad, seeing me about to depart, "you'll come again and talk to us, won't you?"

"Yes—do!" impetuously broke in the junior lad. "It's awfully jolly having visitors, you know."

"All right, little boys—I'll try to. Be quick and get well. Good-bye."

Then I went to a white-faced man who, breathing evenly, with closed eyes, was hugging a Bible against his neck.

"You've got a good friend there," I said.

He did not open his eyes. Instinctively I bent my head to catch any whispered reply. Soon came the faintly articulated words:

"It saved my life."

He looked to be about forty, but spoke in the gentle accents of a child—a drowsy child.

"Ah, you are very, very sleepy, aren't you?"

"Yes," he murmured; and I softly withdrew to the maimed man who was probably dying.

He had been in hospital for some time, and already (as was to be revealed) had woven a web of new expedients about his crippled life.

My eyes rested in some wonderment upon the half-consumed cigarette lying on his table, and he made haste to tell me, with pleasure sparkling in his eyes, that the Salvation Army lady had, by kindly lending her hands to the business, enabled him to smoke.

"That was a great treat," he said, "because, you see, it isn't often the orderlies are able to do it for me. I take up too much of their time without that. They come and feed me at meals; and you've no idea how patient and kind they are."

It was natural to offer a continuation of the appreciated service.

"No, thank you," he replied, "I don't think I'll smoke any more, because it's very nearly tea time"; and, indeed, a distribution of cups, eggs, and bread and butter had already commenced in the ward.

So there was an alternative opportunity of serving him, and I had the privilege of placing food to his mouth. This was to gain experience, and receive instruction, in a matter which the patient had wellnigh reduced to a science. The fragments of buttered bread should be of such and such a size; a slight nod would signal his readiness for more; an emphatic nod meant egg; by gently pressing against the special teacup, he would request its withdrawal; and so on.

Obviously he enjoyed his meal. Moreover, he clearly took a sort of pride in the method of its administration, and in the smooth working of that method. And all the time the peaceful mind of that stricken soldier was full of gratitude.

Think of it: he had given his limbs, and he was giving his life, for others; and when anybody in return rendered him, in his helplessness, some trifling service that cost nothing, he had a thankful sense of being greatly favoured.

The rules of logic do not apply. We can but accept the wonderful fact that, because divine justice is infallible, this self-sacrificing soldier was tranquil and happy. A sustaining grace—those perhaps are the words that best fit the phenomenon. We cannot see the angels; we see only those whom their wings support.

But inevitably that conclusion is partly based on experiences that came three days later, when, at an-

other British base, I visited a fine hospital built and equipped by Canadian money.

My escort on that occasion was a tall, strong, motherly Salvationist who was overflowing with love and laughter, and whose sympathy was so powerfully engaged by each of the wounded soldiers that they all gave her their friendship and confidence.

Chiefly did I linger beside the beds of three who were dying—obviously, and, I think, consciously dying.

Two lay inert in an advanced stage of physical feebleness; but patient smiles came into their shrunken faces of white transparent flesh. And in one case the lad's smiles had a supreme provocation. For (granted facilities by the War Office) his mother arrived just before we left; but as she held his hand, and he looked into her eyes, the rapture on his face was much like the peace that had shone there before.

To the third case my attention was called by the Salvationist sister, who explained that he wanted some letter-writing done for him. This was a man who, because his lungs had been torn by shrapnel, maintained a broken gasp that was painfully audible throughout the ward; and every now and then he had to staunch blood overflowing from his mouth. Any one, therefore, who judged merely from externals, might well have imagined the patient to be in misery. It was not so. We had a long chat (yes; although every third word or so was interrupted by that grievous panting, he was able to

chat), and I found his mental outlook composed and comfortable.

True, the inability to communicate with his people had been a weight on his mind; but that trouble was now past.

"Thank you so much," he gratefully replied, when I volunteered to write on his behalf. "I should like to send a letter to my Aunty"—a request sounding strangely on the lips of a man who looked to be over thirty; and it will indicate how far his articulation was affected when I mention that one word in his aunt's address ("Clock-face"—the name of her road), because wholly unfamiliar to my ears, proved difficult to communicate.

I asked if there were any one else to whom he wished a letter sent.

"Yes, if it wouldn't be troubling you too much. I'd like my sister to know." After giving her name and address, he added: "Tell them I've got a wound in my right shoulder and left side, and tell them my right arm is paralysed, so I can't use it."

"For, indeed, his body was a shattered wreck. But the real man revealed himself as something within, yet apart from, his body; and the real man was tranquil, self-possessed, and thoughtful for others.

"I was talking to him about his soul," the Salvationist sister afterwards told me. "He is beautifully prepared to go."

Nor can I forbear, in this connection, from referring to the glad and tender relationship that everywhere was visible between the Salvationist sister and our wounded soldiers.

She is of the supremely happy number who, in

renouncing passing pleasures, have found abiding joy. The stricken men and lads watch wistfully, eagerly, while from bed to bed she passes as a bright presence, bearing flowers and chocolate in her hands and a message in her heart.

In those hospitals across the Channel I have seen her in several personalities, as girl and as matron, varying in age, social standing, and degree of experience, but never was any difference apparent either in the visitor's eager friendship for the wounded soldier or the wounded soldier's grateful welcome for the visitor.

They make an inspiring picture, he and she—each a voluntary crusader in an unselfish cause; and he finds her very human and kind, and her tidings of salvation most timely.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST TASTE OF WARFARE

A personal confession—Preliminary excursions from G.H.Q.—Graduated doses of danger—A disappointing hill—Shattered housefronts—Impressive preparations: maps, binoculars, and a lunch-basket—The fraternal War Correspondent—An unaltered countryside—Within sight and sound of gun-fire—Peace and war, mixed—Shells bursting overhead: a dainty spectacle—Our ascent of the fosse—Watching an air fight—Attentions from a German battery—Retreating with the lunch-basket—A shower of bullets—Seeking shelter—Water tanks or gasometers?

CONCERNING myself I made early in this book two statements which, though literally true, might seem, at a superficial glance, somewhat conflicting.

I confessed to having ever regarded myself as a physical coward, and I announced an eagerness to visit the Front. Nor would it be correct to say that the desire was entertained in spite of the disability. It would be less incorrect to say that the desire was entertained because of the disability.

This book, you will remember, was to embody an investigation into the effects on human emotions and character of war dangers and the imminence of death; and there was one witness whose testimony promised to be of special value, inasmuch as I could first, humanly speaking, choose his experi-

ences and then command his fullest confidences—that witness being myself; and from this point of view it was useful that, instead of being a reckless hero accustomed to live a hazardous life, I had always shrunk from the thought of bloodshed and warfare with twitching nerves and a sickened heart. From merely the *thought* of it, mind you!

How came it, then—you are entitled to ask—that I eagerly looked forward actually to undergo an experience which, when only a matter of the imagination, had filled me with dread?

I want frankly, humbly, gratefully to acknowledge that, from the first, this adventure of going to the Front was recognised by me as impossible to be undertaken in any spirit of self-reliance—of insecure dependence on one's own poor powers of fortitude. I knew that I could, should, and would lean my full weight on the promise of everlasting security given to dutiful mortals. I knew that my destiny in the hazard would be moulded by divine love, and that I could safely go into the enterprise without forethought or fear—with no preparation beyond accustomed prayer. For I knew that to be shot and killed is the most trivial of insignificant incidents, when you are sure that angel hosts are waiting, with outstretched welcoming arms, on the other side of the sense barriers.

And now, having paved the way with that confession (necessary for purposes of future reference), I will describe the circumstances under which German gunners first fired some of their apparatus of war at—or, anyhow, near—me.

As a prelude to my greater freedom of action,

General Headquarters sent me out by car on several occasions under the escort of a Press officer; namely, one of those experienced subalterns who are charged with the special responsibility of piloting journalists, and other visitors, about the Front.

We began by visiting a town perched on an eminence, whence on clear days a view was afforded of the distant firing line. But our arrival occurred in misty weather, and as the guns sounded faint, and the people of that town seemed drowsily indifferent to all save their peaceful daily affairs, I got no thrill from my sojourn on that hill.

On another occasion we drove through a town which afforded the grim spectacle of several house-fronts which had been shattered by aerial bombs—and this was getting nearer to the real thing.

Then came the adventure which I am about to describe, and which gave early promise of special interest; for a note of organised preparation entered into our departure that morning from General Haig's headquarters.

To begin with, an orderly deposited in the car a lunch-basket overflowing with goodly viands that looked to be a liberal provision for at least three persons—which proved to be the number the caterer had had in mind. For my attentive Press officer came this time accompanied by the War Correspondent of a London newspaper, who, it seemed, because well acquainted with the district to be visited, had been asked, and had very kindly consented, to give us the pleasure of his company, and the advantage of his topographical knowledge on our excursion.

Young, well-built, and of soldierly smartness, the War Correspondent looked very dashing in a khaki uniform differing from that of an officer only in the lack of regimental badges and emblems of rank.

For the rest, he gave evidence of a fraternal spirit by exhibiting two fine pairs of binoculars and explaining that, thinking I might be unprovided with facilities for long-distance observation (which, indeed, was a correct surmise) he had brought those instruments for our joint use.

Then we entered the car and soon were swiftly gliding through the smart quietude of rural France, which must not be pictured as presenting—outside an area of several miles from the firing line—any external indication (except for troops and transport occasionally encountered on the road) that a war was in progress. Hens clucked and cowslips bloomed just as though nothing were the matter. Nay, children still ran and played, and old dames stood gossiping at the gate.

After passing through Bethune, we went south-east, traversing several villages, and so drawing near to the zone of fighting. Arriving at a mining centre occurring on a broad highroad, where some holed and shattered walls could be seen, the authorities arrested our car with an intimation that it must proceed no farther. We accordingly alighted, and while my companions conferred together, I took stock of our surroundings.

What one beheld was neither peace nor war, because both. There was the loud noise of gunfire—as if occurring in the next street—and exploding shells were visible overhead. On the other hand,

the civilian population were not only minding their own business and taking no notice, but (it was Sunday, at noon, with the sun shining) miners stood complacently in their shirt sleeves, doing nothing, infants sprawled at the doorways, and older children were running and whooping, absorbed in their mild sports.

It was almost like looking at two different moving pictures that had been taken by mistake on the same film.

At first my attention was claimed chiefly by something in the sky I had not seen there before. A small cloud of smoke appeared abruptly—like a blob of fleecy cotton wool shining daintily against the blue. Then, in quick succession, others appeared—the heavens in that area breaking into a veritable rash of white eruptions.

"Ah," the War Correspondent turned to explain, on noting my interest, "that's shrapnel bursting. Pretty, isn't it? German anti-aircraft guns are shelling one of our planes. There she is" (and he pointed). "They are shooting rather wide, you will notice."

Searching the azure intently, I saw the gauzy insect flying away from the cluster of tiny cumulus clouds.

Then my attention returned to the surrounding little community, which was remarkable for behaving precisely as such a little community behaves under normal conditions. Those people looked as if they had been bewitched into an ignorance of what was happening round about them. By way of finishing touch to the tranquil scene, two little urchins, mov-

ing along the roadway, hawked Paris newspapers with shrill persistency. Near the railing of a garden, I saw an old man sweeping the road, and doing so with leisurely thoroughness, as though his whole mind were given to the work.

In a word, I beheld conditions that burlesqued those I expected to find in the war zone. Faced by such public indifference, it seemed difficult to understand how the peoples of two countries could go on fighting one another. In many villages of England, I think, the distant war at that moment would have been exciting a more lively interest than was manifested there, where the people lived amid sights, sounds, and smells of the actual conflict. For distance lends excitement to the view, and familiarity breeds a sort of boredom.

But, whatever might be the attitude of others, to my companions and myself the war continued to be of absorbing interest. Carrying between us lunch, maps, and binoculars, the Correspondent and I proceeded on foot to a mine shaft, where we were presently joined by the Press officer, who had meanwhile reported our arrival and programme to the local military command. And with no great favour, it seemed, did the local command look upon that programme, though disapproval had happily not gone the length of a veto.

Mining operations had brought to the surface a huge quantity of material for which there was no occasion, and which, accordingly, had been built into a heap which had grown, with the lapse of time, to a considerable altitude. Knowing of the fine view commanded by this fosse, the War Correspond-

ent had hit upon the excellent idea that we should mount to its summit and there picnic within sight of the battle front.

Up the steep incline we toiled, and when at length the full ascent was accomplished, all sense of fatigue quickly subsided in the pleasure with which I looked out on the vast stretch of green landscape that lay below.

Detail for the most part was tiny but well-defined: ruddy specks for buildings, a pin-point of yellow for a haystack, a spider's thread for a road, a hazy smudge for a village or small town. There was nothing to show that any part of the area, or any of its raised objects, had been knocked about.

That landscape had an empty and deserted look. Of the Germans and Britishers who were burrowed there in their tens of thousands, one saw no sign. Nor, even in the nearest fields, were any sheep or cattle visible.

Of the war there were only two indications. Faint zig-zag markings across some fields were identified as trenches. From various quarters came the report of cannon, differing in volume according to distance, and in some cases preceded by a tiny flash (which one saw if one happened to be looking at the right spot at the right time).

But before I had fully grasped leading features of the landscape, and realised which was Loos, and which Lens, and where was the Hohenzollern Redoubt, the vigilant War Correspondent bade me direct my gaze aloft.

Some half-dozen of our aeroplanes were boldly advancing to observe what was happening along the

German lines. In their vicinity the glowing sky was mottled with exploding shells, no doubt discharged in the alternative hope, if not of bringing them down, then of driving them up.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, eight German machines appeared in the heavens.

The little artificial clouds were sluggishly expanding into indefined shapelessness, and no new ones appeared. Neither Army could shell the hostile aircraft, for fear of hitting its own. It remained for the airmen to do their own fighting.

The War Correspondent was delighted; but mainly, I think, on my account.

"You are indeed lucky," he cried. "There's a great strafe on. I've seen nothing like this for days. The weather has been too cloudy. Now you will see something. Our machines are outnumbered. But do you think they will care? Not a bit of it. See how the Hun planes are trying to rise above ours? Hark! Do you hear the machine-guns? They are beginning to pepper one another. Take these glasses. It's all right—I've got my own. You'll see much better."

Already I had a sense of being, so to speak, in the stalls at the theatre of war. And now opera-glasses were being pressed upon me.

To say that we were lolling back at our ease is to put the matter too mildly. All three of us were lying at full length on our backs, the better to view the aerial encounter which was taking place immediately above us.

"Hullo!" and "Did you hear that?" abruptly exclaimed the War Correspondent and the Press

officer; and I turned my head to find them sitting up and gazing amazed at one another.

As the guns kept going off, and were making a variety of noises, I knew not what sound had arrested my companions' attention.

Then a sort of repressed shriek passed through the air in a rapidly rising and falling crescendo.

"Another one!" cried the War Correspondent.

"Yes—and nearer!" cried the Press officer.

They were now on their feet.

"What is it?" I asked, startled into a sitting posture.

"Shells!" exclaimed the War Correspondent.

"They are shelling the fosse," exclaimed the Press officer, who had temporarily turned his back on the enemy and was gazing across the village from which we had recently emerged. "One fell in that field over there," he continued, "near those three haystacks."

Looking at the place he indicated, I saw a column of smoke arising from the ground.

The other shell, my companions were agreed, had probably fallen in the village.

"We must go down at once," said the Press officer, realising his responsibilities.

Leave our superb point of observation! When the interest was becoming so keen! And just as we were about to begin our lunch!

"Yes," insisted the Press officer, on noting reluctance, not to say mutiny, depicted on the face of his wholly inexperienced ward. For ordinary common sense is apt to desert one in a crisis. It seemed to me unlikely that any one in that great,

wide, distant, empty landscape could have seen such minute specks as we must be on that dark-coloured fosse; and, supposing the Germans had seen us, it seemed incredible that they could succeed in hitting the tapering point on which we were perched.

"Come at once, please. I must insist!" said the Press officer, as he led the way down.

"But is this really necessary?" I asked the War Correspondent. "Those shells could hardly have been meant for us."

"Very likely not," he replied thoughtfully. "It's difficult to say. But the Hun planes can easily have signalled a battery to fire at this fosse. It won't do to stay here. You see, if we draw fire, the shells meant for us are likely to explode among those houses over there."

Beginning to understand, I seized the lunch-basket and set out in the wake of the Press officer.

"Stoop!" he shouted from twenty feet below.

"Yes—bend down," said the War Correspondent, "otherwise the Boches may see you against the skyline."

It did not seem dignified, but I did it; and next minute we all three of us were taking long strides down the steep incline.

Arriving on the gravelly expanse below, we paused to regain out breath and enjoy the sensation of being once more in safety, when—whizz! ping! whizz!

Some invisible objects were smiting the ground all round us.

"Bullets!" exclaimed the Press officer.

Ping! whizz! ping!

Something harmlessly struck my right shoulder—no doubt a tiny up-flying fragment of gravel.

"Bullets!" exclaimed the War Correspondent.

"Yes, but what bullets? Where from? Who is firing?" I asked in bewilderment. For we had been careful to descend the western slope, and the fosse was now between us and the Germans.

"The planes," replied the War Correspondent. "It's their machine-guns."

Of course. In the excitement of finding ourselves a target for shells, we had forgotten about the fight occurring overhead—at least, I had—and apparently that fight was now entering a brisk phase.

"Quick!" cried the Press officer. "There's a good place over there."

"Yes," cried the War Correspondent. "That'll make good cover."

Almost before those words had been spoken, we were all careering across the area of open ground. But even as I ran I felt what a grievous mistake we were making, and that no situation could possibly be more hazardous than the one for which we were heading. Nor, when all three of us were pressing our backs against one of the great circular metal structures, could I forbear from venturing a word of criticism.

"I suppose you know," was my lugubrious comment, "that we are leaning against a gasometer." (I expected that any minute a red-hot bullet from above would plunge into the gas and explode it into one huge column of flame.)

"What!" cried the startled War Correspondent,

taking several rapid paces forward, "I thought they were water tanks!"

"So they are," laughed the Press officer.

Peering underneath, I did indeed see dripping water. Then nothing remained but for me to apologise.

By this time the pugnacious aeroplanes had moved out of sight, and, turning our attention to the luncheon-basket, we began an enjoyable picnic.

CHAPTER VII

AMID STRAY BULLETS

A cemetery by the sea—Standing amid regiments of crosses—Five coffins and some singing birds—Salvationists and the bereaved—Letters of passionate gratitude—Graves under fire—Smoking debris and stoical civilians—French village or British citadel?—The old man and his garden—A demolished church—The surviving Calvary—An astonished Colonel—The mortuary—Tommy's dinner—A crimson stain—Musical bullets—Hiding from a German airman—Inspecting a military post—The youthful O.C.—His damp dug-outs—Pathetic fruit trees—A startling British battery—"Playing at soldiers": bright memories—Personal sensations.

In silvery sunlight of early morning, with a blue strip of sea glowing beyond the city's grey smoke, I have stood with Salvationists in the little cemetery up the hill. It is the city previously mentioned—the city that has its principal buildings transformed into hospitals for British soldiers.

Barely a day passes but one or other of those hospitals sends a pathetic burden up the hill—mortal token that the spirit of still one more brave fellow is released to wider opportunities.

We walked amid the lines of wooden crosses identical in two classes: the brown crosses, which marked the graves of officers; and the more numerous smaller

crosses painted white, which marked the graves of men.

Each cross was set in a rectangular oblong space edged with dwarf growing box; and dainty flowers bloomed in those tiny gardens, which occurred side by side, and end to end, in long vistas.

Reaching the extremity of one row, we found the golden loam outthrown from an extensive excavation some ten feet wide. For in trenches our fallen heroes defended European liberty, and in a trench their broken bodies were buried.

Five plain coffins lay in a row; and without ourselves there had been present only a clergyman, a Presbyterian minister, and the firing party of Tommies with arms reversed. Nay, but I must not forget the birds. Robins and a wren were chirping softly, yet not in sadness.

Those five caskets of stillness and silence—each stood for us as only an abstraction: as one of those brave, unselfish beings who, in the hour of his Empire's need, heard a higher call than the call of personal pleasure, business advancement, and domestic obligations. Each was only a number and a name, with an indication of denominational classification in that the Church of England service was read over four, while a Presbyterian form of wording was recited for the fifth.

But each had been a familiar, well-beloved figure in some family circle. Coffined there in all likelihood were bread-winning husbands and fathers. Perhaps another was somebody's sweetheart and an only son. And none but strangers and little birds were there to see them buried.

Yet a note of sadness is the less justified because an element of comfort here calls for mention.

I have said with what loving devotion the Salvationist sisters attend the dying soldier; and afterwards they follow a personal inclination in standing by the open grave to take a last farewell of their friend. Yet even were that act not so prompted, it would be performed. For the tidings that they were there proves balm to the bereaved, whose hearts may well have been numbed by the thought that their dear one had passed away, and been laid to rest, in the absence of all who cared for him.

You cannot read with undimmed eyes the letters of passionate gratitude that flow in return to the Salvation Army. With their eloquence unaffected by misspelt words and the unpunctuated sentence, they come to the sisters as a wave of encouragement, sustaining them in patient and unceasing toil and happy humility.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, dear friend, whom God sent to comfort my boy"—in such words run scores of these letters—"and please write again to tell me where he is buried, and if there is anything to mark his grave." So, after her long day in camp and hospital, the Salvationist sister sits late at her desk, answering that and many other letters; for any one in trouble has a right to Salvationist sympathy and assistance.

It follows that the appeals and commissions are of great variety, ranging from inquiries about missing sons to messages for dying husbands.

And so it came about that, on departing for a second visit to the firing line, I was deputed by Salva-

tionist sisters to represent them in visiting, at the request of correspondents, graves reported to be situated within the zone of fighting. Which fact assisted other conditions to make my second experience of actual warfare a more serious adventure than its predecessor.

From Bethune this time our car proceeded in a new direction; and soon we stopped at local military headquarters, that the Press officer might secure the company of a brother subaltern acquainted with the adjoining section of the British front.

As I waited in the stationary car, the perspective of housefronts included, a few hundred feet away, the gap where an upper story had been shattered either by a shell or a bomb. Lime-dust was still descending from the smoking debris, showing how recent had been the explosion; but, with only a passing glance at the wreck, drivers of vehicles continued along the road, and pedestrians pursued their way on the opposite pavement.

For to live on the margin of a war is to acquire a remarkable degree of stoicism—a truth destined in a few minutes to be confirmed with new force.

After being joined by a dashing young Lieutenant full of smiling good spirits, we soon were drawing nearer to the boom of cannon and the crackle of rifles, the car picking its way into an inhabited chaos of brick rubble and wrecked dwellings, with here and there a group of surviving cottages.

Poor little French village, across whose narrow streets the great world war had ebbed and flowed; poor little French village that had been captured by the Germans and recaptured by the British—a

noisy destiny, shaped by alien hands, having interrupted its native peace.

Troops in khaki, stealthily moving and skilfully posted, gave to the place a predominant military note—two-thirds British citadel to one-third French village. It was matter of amazement that the latter element should in any degree have remained. But there is something in the French character—nay, there is something in human nature—which prompts a steadfast clinging, despite infinite discouragement and menace, to home and the little bit of family property.

I saw no children, but men and women still dwelt in certain of the habitable cottages—men and women who moved about quietly with grave looks, as became those who held their lives by a precarious tenure.

One old man lived there in a world of his own—a physical no less than a moral world. Amid that shell-torn village he was continuing to look after his little garden, and with consummate care and success. Over his smooth stretches of loose brown earth and his lines of seedling vegetables, I found him bending vigilant, rake in hand (for, with our car placed in sheltered security, we were now advancing on foot). That grey-haired and benign veteran probably would not deem it of much account whether he lived or died; but it evidently mattered much that there should be no decaying leaves, or surface pebbles, or upspringing weeds, in his little kitchen garden with its neat flower borders. If his peace of mind were ever disturbed, or he knew troubled dreams at night, the cause would be related, I think,

less to shrapnel, bullets, and bombs, than to late frosts and the offending snail.

Good, simple old man, I wonder if you still are there or whether you have migrated to a larger paradise.

A dozen or so paces from that garden and we were at the church—a church still standing.

"The Huns, you see," explained our vivacious guide, "have spared this building. The fact is, their gunners find its steeple a useful landmark. But just to show they weren't deterred by sentiment, they put a shell the other day through the choir." And soon we saw such huge apertures in wall and window as might have been caused by some unruly giant armed with a sledge hammer.

The earth below was plentifully besprinkled with fragments of coloured glass, samples of which, at the suggestion of our genial guide, I pocketed as souvenirs.

That church happened to be a landmark for me as well as for the Germans.

A Palmers Green lady, in a letter to the Salvation Army, had entreated them to visit her son's grave, the situation of which she was able to indicate only in vague, inexact terms. Obviously the lad had been buried under fire where he fell, in the orchard of what was once a farm; and surviving comrades had given his mother the best information they could call to mind—on such and such a road, north-west of so and so, half a mile from that very church. Though he shook his head over these directions, my new friend promised to help me to try and find the grave.

Passing beyond that sparsely populated village, we saw no more civilians, each roadside building that came into view being a picture of damage and desolation. We walked towards the noise of fighting (shelling in the slurred base, with a treble staccato of rifle fire), and presently came to what had been the church of an adjoining village. Having no occasion for the edifice as a topographical indicator, the German gunners had reduced it to a dense jumbled heap of broken masonry about ten feet high; the thoroughness of the church's demolition lending emphasis to the survival of its Calvary, which stood intact, over-topping the stones by some six feet or more. Glancing around, one saw that the flights of explosive missiles had smashed other structures and objects that had stood in the locality; all had succumbed to the withering bombardment save that slender erection with its impaled figure of beautiful pathos.

Since we were only a few hundred yards from the Germans, no doubt there were many British soldiers on that ground. Latterly, however, we had seen none but an occasional Tommy or group of Tommies, and it happened that, as we stood gazing at the church wreckage, no fellow-creature was anywhere visible—not, at least, until a staff officer abruptly appeared from nowhere to demand, in a voice of astonishment, and with a face to correspond, who we were and what was our business.

Having glanced at our papers, however, he accepted the position with a shrug of the shoulders, merely pointing out that we were under fire and must be careful.

Then the Colonel (for such proved to be his rank) recalled my attention to the Calvary, observing that its survival was most remarkable, and that he had witnessed the identical phenomenon at other places along the front. I asked him if he had ever seen a fallen Calvary, and he said No; but we agreed that such an object would be unlikely to take one's attention amid the chaos of a shattered church.

Continuing our advance towards the German lines, we were soon glancing down a country lane at some tiled barns of Neuve Chapelle. A little farther on, our guide led us in a somewhat dubious spirit into a side-road, where we presently came upon a company of Tommies, crouching in ambush against a wall, and they directed us by urgent gesture to return, which we lost no time in doing.

A minute or so later our guide's vigilant eye detected a solitary cross erected by the roadside on the margin of a garden or field. But it proved not to mark the grave we sought.

Thereafter our route lay along a thoroughfare shielded by an almost continuous line of cottages and farm buildings, which were all a-zig-zag with the broken edges of apertures where brickwork and roofing had been blown away. Hanging in front of one little dwelling was a board bearing the word "Mortuary." There, as elsewhere, we saw a few inconspicuous khaki figures.

Farther on, in the shelter of a thick wall, some eight or a dozen Tommies were crouching, and hard by was a little oil stove burning beneath a steaming saucepan.

"Is it good?" I asked the nearest lad as, bend-

ing over the pot, I noted a savoury aroma, and saw bubbles of golden fat shining on the boiling broth.

"It's all right," he replied with a complacent smile, "when you've got plenty of bread. We needn't grumble, for two loaves have just arrived."

Moving on, I bethought me that we had both spoken in subdued voices. With the artillery and rifles making such a noise, there could be no sort of military reason for whispering. But nearness to the enemy prompted a muffling of sounds. Some instinct enjoined quiet.

We must have been walking slowly as well as softly, for it was our fortune to be overtaken by a wheeled ambulance pushed by a couple of Tommies.

"Are you having many casualties?" asked the Lieutenant.

"A few," replied one of the Tommies. "We are going to fetch a man who has just been shot in Shepherd's Walk."

As the ambulance went by, I saw a glistening wet patch of crimson on the canvas, at the end where a man's head would lie.

Some fifty yards farther on the road ended at a broader thoroughfare running to right and left. Here a couple of young officers stepped forward to bid us stand in the shelter of a near-by house. While there we heard the quick, vibrating, and almost musical ring of bullets striking the tiles of a building across the road.

But in the action they took, those young officers had not been thinking of rifle fire. Amid the noises of warfare, I was far from noting the whirr of aircraft, but it appeared that a German aeroplane was

overhead, and we were likely, if seen, to attract shells.

The flying enemy having been persuaded by bursting shrapnel to withdraw, we emerged once more upon the highroad. Then by the courtesy of those same young officers I was privileged to inspect an improvised fort or military post. It had originally been a small mansion, probably four stories high, and certainly of recent construction, with a spacious garden planted with fruit trees. The building was now two and a half stories high, and but the naked skeleton of its former self—floors, ceilings, and windows having been shot away, in company with about 50 per cent. of the walls.

We were admitted through a mazy barricade, which, an impressive illustration of military art, was at once solid and squalid. Crossing the hall on two planks, I entered a reception room and the presence of the youthful O.C., who, standing on a heap of brick rubble, gave me a gracious welcome.

Nor did he lose any time in conducting me to the elaborate system of dug-outs at the back of the premises. And certainly, when shells were arriving, those dug-outs would be likely to prove acceptable asylums. True, some persons might object to crouching or lying in two feet or so of water, but, as the young Captain playfully remarked, it is not always possible to please everybody.

I noticed that two standard apple trees and one standard plum had somehow survived the excavations, but they were growing after a somewhat faltering fashion, as though the sap were bewildered

to find soil touching the blossom and the roots reaching down into empty air.

As we peered into those dark, damp dug-outs, the young Captain and I grew confidential.

"It seems only the other day," he remarked, "that I was playing at soldiers and digging places like these on the seashore. And to think," he smilingly added, "that we are doing it in earnest here! That is so difficult to realise, until"—and after a compulsory pause he added, "well, until something like *that* happens!"

There had occurred a report of such violence that the earth trembled beneath us, and it was as though the drum of my ear had broken. This was the first time I had been near a British gun when it was fired.

At short intervals the stunning boom was repeated. But a smile never left the face of that seaside boy who had grown a few years older. We chatted on.

I inferred that he was only just at the end of his school days when war broke out. For his memory seemed to take him straight back to sports as though there were no intervening period of business to be spanned. If blessed with a young brother, I dare say that O.C. had used bucket and spade, in summer time by the sea, within the previous five years.

From that Past of frolic and holidays, what an abrupt and amazing transition to the Present of bloodshed and stress! But his clear eyes and rounded cheeks suggested a boy whose happiness had rested on a sure foundation of goodness; and the transition apparently did not affect him with the

faintest suspicion of bitterness, or gloom, or mutinous self-pity.

As we were taking our leave, I noticed the encircling loop-holed barricade which made the position one to be defended on all sides. Thus, should the Germans succeed in advancing a few hundred yards in that locality, there would be no retreat for the garrison. I could picture that seaside O.C. continuing to direct and encourage his men, a thoughtful smile never long from his lips, until mortally wounded he sank to the ground, and with closing consciousness beheld the golden seashore lapped by little blue waves, sparkling in the splendour of a glorious sunrise.

Continuing along the road, we reduced still farther the distance between ourselves and the Germans. The Lieutenant exercised a vigilant caution, and every now and then caused us to stoop when passing a gap in the screen of hedges and shattered walls. At one spot we came upon a cluster of silent Tommies lying prone, rifles in hand, against a small undulation; our guide seeing in the situation an opportunity to point a useful military moral.

"If," said he, "through carelessness or bravado, we let our heads be seen above that bank, the Germans would be likely to put over a few shells. That might not matter to us, as we should probably have walked away in the meantime, but it would be serious for these men, who are compelled to remain here."

Presently, reaching the limit of sheltered ground, we set about retracing our steps; the return journey being attended by only two circumstances that call

for mention. We examined several wayside crosses without meeting with the name we sought; and in this instance (as in one other) failure attended my efforts to visit a grave on behalf of the Salvation Army.

As we were passing the cottage labelled "Mortuary," it chanced that bullets rang out sharply on striking the roof, and at once the several attendant lads, adopting a precaution officially prescribed, stood rigid with their backs, palms, and heels pressed against the building.

Then we returned past the standing Calvary, the old man's immaculate garden, and the shattered church, to the point where we had to drop our genial pilot; and a few minutes later the car had carried us out of shell-range and into security and—dullness!

With nerves relaxed, I found myself at the end of a pleasurable experience.

In describing our mild adventures at the fosse, I purposely refrained from a definite statement of personal sensations. The fact is, I found the occasion more exhilarating and congenial than I remembered ever before to have found a picnic. Indeed, the state of my feelings seemed little short of scandalous, having regard to the interests I represented and the wholesale tragedy at which we were peering; and at one point I drew the War Correspondent aside, to apologise for enjoying myself, and to express a hope that he would not attribute to callousness what was, apparently, merely the effect of novelty.

As a matter of fact, I found myself on that occasion in some uncertainty as to the correct interpreta-

tion to be placed on my state of mind. I certainly had had no experience of "feeling afraid," but this might be due to one or both of two causes: (1) the trivial and transitory element of danger that attended our adventure; (2) the fact that the danger took me so completely by surprise.

But in the second experience those elements of uncertainty were not repeated, and, so far from feeling any unpleasant timidity, I had the happiness to be exhilarated. I could definitely trace a sustained thrill to a realisation of the risk we were running. The ping-ping of the bullets lent a new spice to existence.

Clearly the man who puts himself in the witness-box—who runs a tape-measure, so to speak, over his moral consciousness—is liable to gather unexpected, and perhaps not very dignified, evidence.

CHAPTER VIII

JIMMY'S OPPORTUNITY

A costermonger and his comrades—"A button short"—Effect of a first shell—In bombarded trenches—An impromptu religious service—"God bless you, Jimmy!"—Prayer and its fruits—"Mumming" a hymn—Men hungry, but not for meat—Resumed devotions—"Like being in Heaven"—The absentee—An unofficial chaplain—In the rest camp—A revival of bad language—Jimmy's venture—A remarkable gathering—Thirty converts—Nightly meetings of growing influence—An officer's testimony—Jimmy injured by liquid fire—His new appointment—Fish and chips.

THE Ypres salient provided me with remarkable evidence of war's effect on the human soul; this evidence being of two kinds: that which came under my own observation, and that which I derived from the experience of an Oxford costermonger named James J. Dingle.

Before being invalided into a sedentary occupation, Private Jimmy saw active service at the Front; and he gave me full details.

It seems that he and his comrades (Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry), with little previous experience of bullets and shelling, went straight into trenches that were being somewhat briskly bombarded. Up to which time the general attitude towards Jimmy was (outwardly, at any rate) one of

good-humoured toleration—an attitude dating from the time when some forty of them first met as joint occupants of a hut.

He told me about that evening.

" 'I'm going to pray,' I says. 'Do you mind?' I says. 'I'm going to pray for the lot,' I says. They just laughed and jeered a bit, but they kept quiet. When I got up from my knees, one says, 'He's got a button short, pore feller'; and another says, 'All the Salvationists are balmy.' I says, 'Yes, men, I began it eight years ago, and I wish I'd been balmy long before that.' "

To be strictly accurate, the general attitude towards Jimmy began to change when they were a mile and a half from the trenches. Then it was they saw their first shell explode, and some one said, "Pass the word down to Jimmy to start up his old favourite, 'When the Roll is called up yonder.' " He sang three verses, and the men joined in the chorus. Then they were called to attention, and ordered to keep silent for the rest of the journey.

Morning had hardly broken when they got into trenches near Ypres and lined up against the parapet.

"The shells," said Jimmy, "were coming over dreadful. A man by the name of Sam said, 'Wot does Jimmy think of it?' I said, 'I think our time is come. We'd better pray.' And we did. I started. 'O Lord,' I says, 'we feel that our time is come. Prepare each one of us for what Thou see fit to call us to. Bless and strengthen every man in these 'ere trenches. If our time is come, may we all feel and believe that it is well with our souls.' I

says: 'I'm praying for you all. Pray for yourselves!' The tears were running down their cheeks. They said, 'God bless you, Jimmy!' I says: 'And God bless you, my friends!' Then I says, 'O Lord, help us. Make us die easy if our time is come.' That did me good. I 'ad felt a bit shaky, but after that I didn't mind if my time was come. I could see God was working through them. They said, 'Jimmy, you mean business; we can see what it stands for to be a Christian. It makes us not afraid of death.' "

He gave other details of that critical first spell under fire. It seems that Sam was on his right—Sam, whose bad language had been conspicuous in a crowd where blasphemy was the rule. A man named Ted was on his left. At first Jimmy spoke merely to his immediate neighbours, but soon he communicated with the general body of men by the means they had adopted in communicating with him. Before praying the second time, he said, "Pass the word down that we are going to pray"; and on both sides of him the word was passed down, until the whole line were on their knees. The trench being dry, and it being easy to rest one's rifle against the parapet, there was no difficulty about kneeling.

"We prayed," said Jimmy, "for about a quarter of an hour."

"Rather a long time," I pointed out.

"Yes," said Jimmy, "but the shells were still coming over cruel."

After they rose from their knees, Sam said, "Good old Jimmy, that's done me a lot of good. I never prayed before, but I've prayed now."

"As for me," Jimmy testified, "I found myself

coming a lot more cheerful. After we had prayed, I was filled with joy, and was more stronger to stand the dangers—more myself. I started to sing 'Abide with Me,' and I heard one or two at it on both sides of me. They didn't know the words, but they just mummed it. After that we had other hymns the same way, until seven o'clock came, when we got the order to stand down and sit about the trench cooking our food."

Nobody, however, wanted any food. Jimmy and his friends merely wanted something with which to moisten their parched throats. Most of the men had already used up the pint of water with which they started from camp. But bodily needs occupied a subordinate place in their minds. They crowded round the Oxford costermonger, and encouraged him to dilate on his favourite theme.

"Then I felt," said Jimmy, "that I needed God's guidance more than ever. They liked to hear me tell 'em about Jesus, and they said they could see there must be something in religion after all. I says to myself, 'Jimmy,' I says, 'this is your golden opportunity.' What if I 'adn't been converted? What would 'ave become of me—and them? 'What a blessing,' I says to myself, 'I'm a Salvationist and got a clean 'eart.' And every time I said anything, they said, 'Go on, Jimmy—God bless you!' There was no more swearing. The men were very quiet; they seemed different altogether. I started once more to sing 'Abide with me,' and two or three men said they wanted to live good."

During the day a water supply was found, and the men went thither to replenish their supplies.

Jimmy is sure that no man slept or did any cooking. The shrapnel was still bursting, and occasionally a wounded man was borne along the trench. Jimmy was always the centre of a cluster of men listening gratefully to what he had to say.

After dark they once more stood along the trench, each man under orders periodically to stand erect, aim, fire, and then duck down again. But the edge of that new peril was blunted through a happy inspiration that came to Jimmy. Following his example, and at his suggestion, they began their spell of fighting with a few minutes of kneeling at prayer; as was destined to become their regular custom when going on duty.

And after those two hours "on," they again had five hours "off"; which continued to be their programme while in the trenches. I asked Jimmy if by the second day he had found his appetite or wanted a nap.

"Oh, no," he explained, "the shells were still coming over something awful. But you wouldn't believe how different the men were. You should have seen the smiles on their faces—nothing but smiling and smiling. It was just like being in Heaven. The devil was missing that time. I felt he had left us altogether."

I asked Jimmy, who has a fine memory, to repeat some of the things he said to his comrades during those first days under fire.

"I told 'em," replied Jimmy, "what Christ had done for me, and I said He'd do the same for them. We haven't got to go to church to get Christ," I says; "we can have Him here. God is waiting with

outstretched arms," I says, "to receive each one of us. I really felt God had made me the chaplain."

So it went on for five days.

"And just fancy," said Jimmy with shining eyes, "no sign of the devil for five days!"

Then Jimmy and his friends, being relieved by other troops, retired to spend seven days in a rest camp behind the lines.

On the march, the unofficial chaplain received a shock. He heard some swearing. The devil had come back.

When evening arrived, Jimmy and his friends felt much refreshed physically by the food and sleep they had enjoyed during the afternoon. But Jimmy had heard more swearing, and his heart was heavy. A few short hours before, and there had seemed no limit to the glorious results vouchsafed to his efforts. Now those results seemed to fade, and he was left with a mocking sense of failure.

And here we may note that his Salvationist activities in Oxford, his native city, had been limited. In frequent request were his services as a vocalist, but, beyond being occasionally called upon for a personal testimony, he was not asked to speak. Since joining the British Army, he had, it is true, been constantly pleading with his comrades, though largely in an informal and conversational way.

During that first evening in the rest camp, he met a Corporal who, as an earnest member of the Church of England, had on previous occasions proved a sympathetic companion. "Do you think," asked downhearted Jimmy, "if I was to start a meeting, I'd get any round me?" The Corporal was afraid not.

"Well, I'll think I'll chance it," said Jimmy; and, taking off his khaki tunic, he stood conspicuous in his Salvation jersey.

"Hello! There's Jimmy at it again," cried out a laughing lad as he walked by. It was not very encouraging, but Jimmy held to his purpose.

"I started off," he told me, "with

> "'Hark! the Gospel news is sounding,
> Christ has suffered on the tree;
> Streams of mercy are abounding,
> Grace for all is rich and free.'

"'And all,' I says, 'means all of you.' Well, after a bit, one or two came round. But I went on talking with my head down, and when I come to look up, what do you think? Why, there I was in the middle of a great big ring, with five or six hundred crowding round! It give me such a happy feeling—my golden opportunity come true again. I set 'em singing, and they sang wonderful hearty! Then I thought how nice for them to hear something out of the Bible, so I took mine out and opened it. But I'm a very bad scholar, so I said to the Church of England Corporal, who was standing near, 'Brother,' I says, 'will you help me by reading the Word of God?' He said, 'I'll be only too pleased,' and he read out of Matthew. Then, after another hymn, I said, 'Look here, we're out at the war, and we don't know when we are going back, so let us make the best of it. I'm here,' I says, 'to try and cheer you by God's help. Now I want you to sing as hearty as you can.' You just ought to have heard 'em!" exclaimed the enthusiastic costermonger.

"A Sergeant stepped into the ring," he continued, "and said, 'Will you have mother's favourite hymn, "Lead, kindly light"?' Oh, if you could only have heard them singing it! After that, I give my testimony. I told 'em that first of all I'd got God to thank; but the Salvation Army came next. It was a wonderful meeting, and it kept on getting more wonderful. For after a bit there was a lot of them kneeling on the ground; but only thirty really decided and got properly converted."

"*Only* thirty!" I interjected.

"Ah, but wait," replied Jimmy, his face radiant and his eyes brimming over, "that was only the beginning. We had more wonderful times still during the next seven days. At every meeting there was a bigger lot converted, and, in all, hundreds got the blessing."

But I wanted more details.

"Those first thirty?" echoed Jimmy. "Well, them and me had a nice long talk after the meeting was over. I believe they was all of 'em backsliders, or pretty near all of 'em, and some had been Salvationists—one from Regent Hall, one from Canada, and I forget where the others come from. I told 'em I'd pray for them, 'but,' I says, 'you must pray for yourselves.' And I told 'em that if they wanted to please their mother or father or wife they'd better write home and say they'd been to the Saviour, and intended to trust Him in this time of trouble. 'And if you do trust Him,' I said, 'He'll not only bless you, but keep your wife and all your other dear ones. Write and say, "I've come back to the Lord."' And later in the evening one told me he'd

written home and he'd got those words in the letter. I said, 'Tray Bong!' "

"And when did you have your second meeting?"

"Next night," replied Jimmy; "and I got a lot of help from the converts that came forward at the first meeting, specially the backsliders from the Army. They went among the men fishing for souls, and we had over seventy come forward at that meeting. And so it went on growing every day—more helpers and more converts. You can't have no idea what wonderful meetings they were."

But from independent quarters I had heard about the boundless enthusiasm, and far-reaching spiritual power, manifested at those gatherings.

Indeed, of the numerous eminent divines whom Oxford has given to the world, how many, I wonder, have influenced more conversions in a fortnight than were influenced by one who, trundling a wheelbarrow, goes through the streets of Oxford selling bananas at two a penny and fine ripe strawberries.

"At one meeting," continued Jimmy, "an officer of our A company gave a wonderful testimony. He said he had tried both plans, and the only way to get peace and happiness was by serving God. At another meeting I saw our dear friend the chaplain in the crowd, and I asked him to come in the ring and give us a word. He said they ought to be proud of a man like me, and he turned round to me and he said, 'God bless you, and God bless the Salvation Army!' Afterwards he said to me, 'We as church people haven't come up to the standard we ought to have done.' He said, 'I couldn't have struck out like you have done. I wish I could get

the same spirit.' He was the Rev. Mr. Jones, Congregationalist, and he gave me a nice Bible."

On returning to the trenches, Jimmy saw coloured flames advancing towards him, and his next experience was to wake up in a hospital.

It was a disappointment to be pronounced medically unfit for further service in the firing line; but Jimmy recovered his musical tendencies on learning of the sphere to which the authorities proposed to appoint him.

At various parts of the war zone in France, the Salvation Army had, as the reader is aware, erected huge huts in which Tommy took meals, wrote letters, listened to music, and found friends anxious to help him in all possible ways. At E——, one of the British bases, a hut of this character had been so greatly appreciated that the local military command, noting that the small staff of Salvationists were condemned by their success to unceasing labours, decided, as some recognition of the valuable service they were rendering the British Army, to allot them an orderly from its ranks. And it is certainly an eloquent testimony to official care in making appointments that Private James J. Dingle was appointed to the post.

So it came about that, at the time of my meeting with Jimmy, he was daily putting in eighteen hours of joyful service in the hut, where he had won an incidental reputation for the excellence of the fish and chips he supplied to an unending stream of customers in khaki.

CHAPTER IX

HOLINESS AND HEROISM

Attached to a battalion—The considerate Adjutant—My servant—Taking meals with the subalterns—A mess joke—Story of an irate Major—Joseph's testimony—A Ramsgate Salvationist—My tent—Reading in bed—The salient at night—Memories of Tiberias—My unsuccessful petition—Transferred to another regiment—A friendly Quartermaster—Listening to the pipes—The Gay Gordons and their dead—Buttered toast from the Quartermaster-sergeant—The spiritual experiences of Sergeant Withers—Living by faith under fire—Obstructed moonlight; an answer to prayer—The faithful Sergeant's splendid bravery.

So far my visits to the Front had been in the nature of day excursions, and I had returned to sleeping quarters beyond the range of German artillery.

But the time came, when, on taking leave of the Press officer one afternoon, I found myself attached to a battalion in a camp behind the Ypres salient. This proved an instructive experience.

The Adjutant—a young Scotsman whose many responsibilities failed to cloud his sunny disposition—allotted a tent for my exclusive use, appointed a lad from the ranks to serve me as orderly or servant, and laid him under imperative obligations (which my intervention was powerless to modify) in the matter of providing me with a camp bed, three warm blankets, an oil-heating stove, a pail of water

to wash in, and such other civilised amenities as might be within the reach of an army in the field.

I took my meals with the subalterns—lion-hearted lads overflowing with chaff and innocent humour: three of whom, when war broke out, were at the University, one being in training for a missionary career in China; while the president of the mess, a comparatively grave senior, aged twenty-two, had enjoyed a little business experience with a famous Canadian firm.

Several times in my presence orders arrived for one or other to go in command of a party of military navvies, and fill shell-holes on roads within the salient; it being revealed as the stock mess joke on such occasions that the chosen comrade should be asked, in a tone of mock solicitude, what flowers he would wish at his burial. It was not a very nice joke, it was not even a funny joke, but it will serve to illustrate the mood in which those youngsters confronted peril.

Perhaps I may be permitted to give the reader another taste of the happy spirits prevailing in that little wooden hut, where a sufficiency of simple, well-cooked food was served in enamelled ware on oil baize.

"I say L——," exclaimed one of our number just returned from a nocturnal excursion of the kind mentioned, "were you down at —— Gate last Wednesday night?"

"Yes," replied the divinity student, who happened at the moment to be showing me his boxful of various detonators, which he obviously collected with a fervour usually associated with philately.

"And did you fill up a hole near Mokey's Bower?"

"Let me see," ruminated L——. "Yes—a whopper. Why?"

"Fill it in nicely, did you?" continued the inquirer, struggling with pent-up emotion.

"Rather! At first I thought we were in for an all-night sitting. Usually the stuff takes a lot of looking for round about there. But I had the luck to find a ripping heap not twenty yards from the hole—there must have been five tons of it. We had to use the lot, but I was proud of the job when it was finished."

"Well, a gunnery Major there is very anxious to meet you," exclaimed the other, unable any longer to repress his mirth. "Talk about hot air—I was glad to escape with a whole skin. He wants to know the name of the jackass who carted away the screen of his battery. It seems they were the best part of a week collecting that stuff. He says it was a vital part of the mask for his guns, and he was evidently awfully proud of it—had carefully built it up to look like an ordinary wayside heap of building material."

"Yes, but," protested L——, "that is just what I thought it was! He shouldn't be so jolly realistic."

However, little beyond a superficial friendship is possible with men met only in a group at meals; and it happened that those bright young officers yielded me less instruction and inspiration than did Joseph Turner, the lad who acted as my orderly.

Knowing him to have been chosen at random to serve me, I looked forward with special interest to the confidential talk our relations would enable

me to have with him. And certainly if he could be accepted as a typical Tommy, the spiritual state of the British Army was something to rejoice over. For at a first word about vital matters, his eyes brightened, his tongue was loosened, and he told me that, when under fire, he always put himself in God's keeping and awaited the issue without fear.

Not that Joseph's interests were limited to the material world in years preceding the war. He had been a punctual attendant at a Bible-class in his native town of Newark, where he was also an occasional visitor to the Salvation Army corps.

And to Joseph I owed the pleasure of meeting some Salvationist comrades of his, including a Ramsgate furniture-dealer, who mentioned that he had learnt to live by faith at home (notably when raising money for his corps), and that during heavy fighting at Loos and elsewhere he had remained placid and cool, always with the words running in his mind,

> "So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
> Will lead me on."

"If I hadn't been a Salvationist," he said, "you wouldn't have seen me in the British Army. In the old days I hadn't enough sense of duty, for one thing, or the grace to make the sacrifice, for another."

These conversations happened on my first night under canvas—an occasion of pleasant and impressive sensations.

After camp fires and sounds had one by one died

down, I lay for an hour or so luxuriously reading in bed. For, at the Front, it seemed, there were no onerous lighting regulations, with stern special constables to see to their enforcement. Thus, with official permission, I had two candles by my bedside, while the flap of the tent hung open in the interests of ventilation.

Nor, having laid aside my book shortly after midnight, could I forbear from emerging through that flap to take stock of my surroundings.

In the encircling stillness only near tents were visible, and that dimly. But it was the northern horizon that claimed attention, and this by reason of the shimmering lights that appeared and faded here and there, and of the occasional rise and fall of brilliant stars. One gazed from right and left round a semicircle of illumination, which pulsated in unison with the rumble and boom of firing. But what most impressed the imagination was a fact not seen or heard.

We were behind the Ypres salient—that crucial spot in Europe where the British Empire had been so vigorously menaced and so valiantly safeguarded; that little bit of Belgian geography where a lot of English history was occurring. But the process was taking place, at any rate within the range of my consciousness, under most soothing and restful conditions.

Not since sojourning on the pebble shore of Galilee, when the smell of quiet waters was borne on the night air into my tent, had it been my lot to sleep under canvas. Thus memory enriched with tranquilising sensations a physical experience in itself

acceptable and pleasant; and I floated into dreamland with Tiberias of golden memories linked with modern Ypres in one thought—a thought still permeating my being when morning brought smiling Joseph to announce that my shaving water was in the milk tin, and that a Taube was flying overhead, and that breakfast would be ready in twenty minutes.

To be living thus under picturesque conditions, and amid strong human interests, would, one might think, have satisfied anybody; but soon I was asking permission (of both the subalterns and their superiors) to go and have a peep at Ypres. For to be so near that famous place without visiting it proved very tantalising.

My appeals were in vain, but they elicited the curious fact that those officers had not themselves, for the most part, been inside the city, which they said was under continuous shell fire—a fact rendering it impossible, in their judgment, for a civilian to go there. They also said I might as well ask them to take me into the trenches—a remark that served to cloud my hopes. But only temporarily. For on the following afternoon word arrived that I was to report myself to the Colonel of another battalion, who would arrange, it was stated, for me to visit the trenches. Whereupon, taking leave of Joseph and my other friends, I set off, under a suitable escort, to perform the journey rendered necessary by this intimation.

And soon my new O.C., with raised eyebrows, was expressing himself doubtful if I should have a very rosy time in the trenches. It seemed they had

not yet been properly restored after seven and a half recent hours of shell fire.

However, my papers were explicit, and so he handed me over to the hospitable resources of the Quartermaster—a fine figure of a man, gracious and soldierly, with whom I was soon traversing duck boards. Yet suddenly, by common consent, we stood stock still—listening.

Near by, where little white tents twinkled among the trees, the pipes had struck up. It was masterly playing, full of sadness, rhythm, and determination.

Presently the rigid Quartermaster was murmuring explanations:

"The Gay Gordons, you know. They were with us last week. Another search party is going out to-night. So there'll be more funerals in the morning. The pipes are getting ready—playing the lament, don't they call it? You like the pipes?"

But who could fail to like them under such conditions?

Daylight had already waned sufficiently to lend emphasis to the few camp fires—braziers temporarily blazing. A splutter of laughter and splashing arose from a row of Tommies who, stripped to the waist, were enjoying an *al fresco* toilet. From surrounding huts and tents came a hum of mirth, conversation, and song; and out of the medley I heard one voice, in a spasm of innocent exuberation, abruptly carol forth:

"Oh my!
I don't want to die;—
I want to go 'ome to my muvver."

Another element in that background of sound was the muffled growling of artillery.

Reaching the Quartermaster's store—which proved to be a conglomeration of military requisites, ranging from dynamite to dominoes—Quartermaster A. A. Rowe introduced me to Quartermaster-sergeant J. Powell, who, after seeing the visitor comfortably seated on an upturned box, went in quest of tea, buttered toast, and Sergeant Withers. Not that I had asked for anything or anybody. But on official introduction my regiment was indicated as the Salvation Army, and there was a keen look on the radiant face of Quartermaster-sergeant Powell.

Asquat a case of hand-grenades, Sergeant T. D. Withers, of Fleetwood, was soon telling me how, as a self-righteous lad who actually taught in a Sunday-school, he experienced the transforming revelation of his own unworthiness, and had since lived by faith in humble dependence on imparted guidance. When he lapsed into reliance on his own judgment (as in courting a first sweetheart), things went wrong; when he asked direction (as in choosing his beloved wife), happiness resulted.

For Sergeant Withers spoke with a beautiful candour, and in a gentle voice, his mind full of trust and happiness, like a little child's.

"And," I put the superfluous question, "you live under fire by faith?"

He smiled and answered:

"What other way is possible? Shall I give you one instance—one among so many? The communication trenches were battered in, and we had to go across a bit of top ground that the Germans

could see, which made it impossible to get into the front lines, or come out of them, by daylight. Well, one night, when our company was going in, the moon lit up the whole place so brightly that we were certain to be spotted. For a few minutes I thought, 'So this is the end for some of us'; then I remembered and prayed. I did not see how it could be done, but I prayed, 'O Lord, the bright moonlight; get rid of the bright moonlight, dear Lord.' And just as we entered the dangerous part, a cloud, which I hadn't seen before, went right in front of the moon, and we walked across the ground in darkness and safety. Then, as soon as the last man was in the trenches, out came the moon again as bright as ever."

As he told me of this, his voice sank to a quavering whisper, and his eyes were moist—facts which were to acquire a new significance in the retrospect, two minutes later.

The Sergeant had modestly withdrawn upon the return of Quartermaster Rowe—that splendid soldier, the claret ribbon on his breast (though I did not know this at the time) celebrated thirty-three years of military service. And these were the first words uttered by the Quartermaster when we were alone:

"Been having a chat, I see, with Sergeant Withers. Well, I wonder if you knew you were talking to one of the bravest men in the British Army? In the affair last week he was simply wonderful—here, there, and everywhere, rescuing the wounded, carrying ammunition, helping everybody; and amid that hurricane of shell fire, which went on for seven hours and a half, mind—and it was then we had our

heaviest losses—all the time he was as busy in assisting others, and as forgetful of himself, as a man could be. I tell you, some of us have put in a strong recommendation that Sergeant Withers' services on that occasion should be officially recognised."

"That affair last week—what was it?" I asked.

"We recaptured the International trench, and took other trenches just beyond—on the Bluff, you know. Not a very big operation, no doubt," he modestly added, "and perhaps it didn't impress you very much."

But, indeed, as the reader will not need to be told, it impressed me deeply. For had I not met wounded heroes of that fight on their arrival by train at the base? And had I not afterwards become personally acquainted with many of those heroes as they lay in the Casino hospital?

It was appropriate and congenial that the battle experiences now to be disclosed should be those in which my friends had been involved.

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF THE BLUFF

The Quartermaster's story—Seven hours of din and slaughter—Mothering the prisoners—A Lieutenant's experiences: held, wounded, crippled, threatened and cheerful—Concerning death: fallacies confuted by experience—Mrs. Booth and the *Empress* mourners—The best-liked man of the regiment—A *War Cry* monopoly—Droll adventure of the Mascot—A gunner's eloquent silence—The Teetotal Division—No use for rum rations—The Quartermaster and the Salvation Army: an unexpected tribute—"My little red jersey."

CONCERNING the "International" affair, Quartermaster Rowe proved a graphic, if reluctant, witness.

"Ah," he said, "it isn't for us—we're the 8th King's Own Royal Lancasters, you know—to say much about it, because, well" (his manner revealing interesting cross-currents of attempted reticence and involuntary pride), "we were given the place of honour—I mean, the middle, which had to begin the attack—with the 1st Gordons on one side, and the 2nd Suffolks on the other, to follow on. Well, sir, it was all over very soon—the actual fighting, I mean—and we had captured the trenches and taken our prisoners, when the continuous shelling began; the barrage, or curtain fire, as it is called, which we put over on the Germans to bar reinforcements, and which they put over on us to keep off our supplies

and hem us in. The shells that fell short and burst in our lines did heavy execution, especially among the wounded and those who were looking after them. And, as I say, that din and slaughter went on," he added pensively, "for seven and a half hours."

"Why did it leave off then?" I asked.

"Why?" echoed the Quartermaster. *"Why?* Well, because human endurance always reaches an end at last; and all the gunners engaged must have been ready to drop, their strength entirely spent. As for our lads, by that time some of them were pretty far gone, too, what with one thing or another, including thirst and the want of food."

"But they had their iron rations?"

"Yes," exclaimed the Quartermaster, "they had their iron rations, and they had the tea in their flasks; but, would you believe it?"—and he lifted his hands, genially aghast—"they gave nearly all that food and drink to the prisoners! I've had a little experience of soldiers—this is not my first campaign, sir—but, I tell you, the lads are a marvel. In the actual scrap our side showed plenty of dash, to say the least, and certainly no victory could have been more complete; but, the fighting over, there they were fussing over their prisoners (of whom we took more than 300) like a lot of mothers. It was, 'Cheer up, old chap!' and 'Buck up, we won't hurt you!' and 'Don't worry, old fellow; your wounds will be seen to.' I heard them myself, for the shelling hadn't started then; and they were patting them on the back, and making rough-and-ready bandages for them to be going on with, and giving them tea and bully-beef and biscuits. In

fact," added the Quartermaster, as he tried hard to look displeased, but entirely failed to hide his gratification—"In fact, I sometimes think our lads aren't *fit* to go to war; for when it comes to the hating-your-enemy part, they are no good at all."

"Did the mothering stop when the shelling began?"

"Stop!" he cried, "not a bit of it. There were a lot of casualties among men who, instead of taking cover, remained in the open to feed the prisoners, and help them along, and look after them generally. They couldn't do enough for the Germans all of a sudden—the very same Germans, mind you, who for days and weeks and months had been sniping and bombing and shelling them and their pals!"

"You say you had heavy losses?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the Quartermaster; and for a while he was silent, his gaze directed out of the little window, which commanded a view of the tents and trees and a browsing goat. When he spoke again, the exultation had for the moment died out of his manner.

"We went in," he said, 967 strong, and we had 320 casualties, including about 90 dead. But figures don't tell you much. It's when you're used to sitting down ten in your mess, and suddenly you find the orderly has only had to lay for six—that's when it comes home to you. And then to think that you will never again see So-and-So, though the sound of his bright laughing voice is still ringing in your ears; or that other one, who was so sympathetic and useful and your special friend. Ah, yes, we lost a lot

of fine fellows, including some splendid young officers. But how gamely they fought and died!"

Once more the Quartermaster's face was aglow, his voice vibrant with an impersonal pride.

"We had a Lieutenant named Bowden," he said, "and his case will serve to show you what I mean. Such a pleasant, light-hearted, and capable young fellow he was, absolutely unselfish and as brave as the bravest. Well, in the opening charge he had the bad luck to get impaled on barbed wire. There he stuck helpless, an easy target for the enemy. In quick succession he received two severe lung wounds, after which a bullet shattered his left shoulder. Then he saw a German advancing with fixed bayonet to run him through the body. It was a terrible position—held, wounded, threatened and crippled; but Lieutenant Bowden kept his head. Stealthily drawing his revolver and carefully choosing his moment, he fired point-blank at the German and brought him down. Next minute a bullet struck Bowden's right shoulder; 'and then,' he afterwards said with a bright smile, 'I thought I had done my bit, so I curled over.' "

"He survived, then?"

"Yes, long enough to have his wounds attended to at the dressing station. Then, as he lay on a stretcher awaiting removal, a bursting shell wiped him and the stretcher out of existence."

And note that a moment later the Quartermaster and I were talking lightly about something else.

For to visit the Front is to find yourself at close quarters with supreme truths, which, accordingly, are seen with a new distinctness. During peace and

prosperity (the soil in which Agnosticism flourishes) we are apt to look upon the inevitable mortal culmination of death as a dire catastrophe, though happily a catastrophe so rare and remote that one need not think about it—a string of fallacies which are blown to pieces at the Front. Death there is anything but rare and remote: it is seen near at hand and frequently, and in the close view it is revealed far more often as a glorious climax than as a gloomy tragedy.

The same, of course, is true of death in the family circle. In its actual presence we usually find the bereaved ones composed and upheld, instead of beside themselves, as we had pictured their pitiful case. Death by them is recognised as a transition, a temporary parting, a going on ahead—as a beginning rather than an ending. Nor can I forbear in this connection from recalling an instructive sequel to the loss of many Salvationists on the s.s. *Empress of Ireland*. At a memorial service in London, Mrs. Bramwell Booth, telling how she had visited the bereaved families in England, spoke of her relief and gratitude at finding them marvellously sustained by grace, instead of being in the grief-distraught condition her imagination had suggested.

And so, as I say, from the splendid vantage point of the Front, death loses its false character of a grim and monstrous calamity. At the Front one understands, without mental fumbling, about the living soul of the dead boy. At the Front one finds, among our lads generally, the bright eyes and happy hearts that reveal peace and understanding.

But to resume my narrative. Quartermaster-Ser-

geant Powell returned to the store, and, addressing me, said:

"I've been trying to find some one I should very much like you to meet. Seeing you so interested in Sergeant Withers, I know how delighted you would be with Sergeant Towndrow. He is such a quiet, unassuming fellow, and yet, do you know, he's one of the most splendid influences and best-liked men in the camp. But unfortunately I find he has gone down to hospital."

"That is news to me," commented the Quartermaster, "and bad news. It must be something serious, for he wouldn't easily give in. Yes; Sergeant Towndrow is the means of helping many of his comrades. He's a very, very fine fellow."

Conversation was here interrupted by the arrival of a messenger; and, business temporarily claiming the attention of both my companions, I set forth alone on a stroll round the camp. Nor was it long before my wandering footsteps had brought me to the large recreation hut, where I made two notable discoveries. Outside there lay on the ground 250 shovels—destined for the working-party which, after nightfall, were to visit newly acquired trenches for the double purpose of recovering the dead and rebuilding parapets. Inside, the perspective of chairs and tables revealed three journals open for perusal: one in the foreground, another in the middle distance, a third at the far end; and on investigation I found that the first was half of the past week's *War Cry,* while the second proved to be the other half, and the third turned out to be none other than an entire second copy of the same issue.

"Who put these *War Crys* here?" I asked a private engaged in writing a letter.

"I don't know for certain," he replied, "but I expect it was Sergeant Towndrow."

Then I returned to the store and to the society of my two friends.

"Have you mentioned about the Mascot, sir?" the Sergeant asked his superior.

"No," came the reply, "but he *must* hear about the Mascot"; and the genial Quartermaster broke into a hearty laugh. "You tell him. I must run away now and see the Adjutant."

"The Mascot"—I was soon learning—"is a droll little chap whom everybody likes, and we give him that nickname because he's our smallest man—in fact, goodness knows how he got into the Army at all. Well, the boys had just gone over the parapet, and an officer went hurrying along to see the last man out of the trenches, when who should he find left behind but the poor little Mascot, who was making prodigious efforts to climb up, and was almost choking with mortification because he kept slipping back. 'Here! Get over,' said the officer; whereupon the Mascot frantically twisted round, saluted, and said, almost with tears in his eyes, 'Please, sir, *would* you mind giving me a bump up?' So the officer assisted his ascent, the Mascot losing no time in grabbing the four bombs he had pushed on ahead of his own movements. With one bomb in each hand and the others in his pocket, away darted the excited Mascot, the officer following close on his heels. And soon the Mascot stopped at a little length of trench that had not detained the main body in

their dash forward. In rapid succession he threw two bombs, which duly exploded, and he was already in the act of taking aim with a third when his demeanour underwent an abrupt change, and, standing there without moving, he gazed helplessly down upon the enemy he had assaulted with so much spirit. 'Go on, throw the others,' shouted the officer, who, as he came up, could see a group of gesticulating Germans at the farther end of the trench. 'But, sir, they want to surrender!' cried the Mascot in a quavering, awe-struck voice; and, sure enough, the officer found them with outstretched hands, and pleading for 'Maircy, Komerade!' 'All right; take them prisoners, then,' ordered the officer, as he hurried on to the main battlefield."

"Which left the Mascot with rather a heavy responsibility, one would think?"

"Yes, but he was quite equal to it. As he was in possession of bombs those Germans were quick to lay down their arms at his direction. It seems he had knocked out four, but there were eight left. And the strange thing is that he brought them all safely through the seven and a half hours' shelling. Being so proud of his prisoners, he must have taken the most scrupulous pains to keep them out of harm's way; and no one who saw it will ever forget the scene next morning, when he brought his prisoners into camp. A Highlander led the way, then in single file came the eight prisoners, and behind them marched the Mascot. His head was held well back and his chest was thrown well out, but, compared with those burly Germans, he looked smaller than ever. 'Why, what have you got there?' asked an

officer on their arrival. 'My captives, sir,' replied the Mascot."

Still more light was destined to be thrown on the psychology of the regiment to which I was temporarily attached.

During the evening, business brought to the store a succession of privates and N.C.O.'s., and nearly all lingered for a word or two of gossip.

Only one subject was referred to—the recent engagement. Nearly always the allusion was to lost comrades or stern vicissitudes of the fight, and always the speaker and his hearers were involved in a common ecstasy that rounded their cheeks and put a sparkle in their eyes.

Upon the entrance of a certain machine-gun Sergeant there was a general hush, for it seemed he had had some epic experiences in his corner of the hurly-burly, so that his reminiscences were eagerly awaited. But he merely stood bolt upright, slowly repeating: "Aye, aye, it were turrible—turrible. I want na more—I want na more." But the look he fixed on space was a look of absolute rapture.

A reference to rum rations drew interesting disclosures.

"Yes, they have to be served," said the Quartermaster-sergeant, "and I, who am a life-long abstainer, have to see they are available. On the day we have been referring to, I sent the rum to the trenches and the Colonel sent it back. The division we belong to, while sometimes called the Iron Division, is usually known as the Teetotal Division. By no means all the men are teetotallers, but there is a heavy percentage who are. Some of us look in

that direction to explain the efficiency which belongs —or at any rate is said to belong—to our division."

Callers gradually dropped off, and as the hour of midnight drew near I was persuaded to seek repose on the camp bedstead so kindly placed at my disposal in the store. But it was my firm resolve not to go to sleep. The Quartermaster-sergeant had announced his intention to remain awake until the return of our search party in the small hours, when he was anxious to help in supplying them with food. Fain would the visitor have emulated that generosity; but, alas, promptly did I succumb to the soothing lullaby of bursting shells and gnawing rats.

Nor did an orderly wake me until the store was bathed in sunlight and we were well embarked on the day that was to witness the strange adventures that befell me in passing through Ypres to the trenches.

The Quartermaster insisted on accompanying me to the car, when, with a final grip of the hand, he said:

"I shall always have a soft place in my heart for the Salvation Army. As a lad of twelve at Peckham I belonged to it, and very proud I was of my little red jersey. But there is a deeper reason for what I feel towards General Booth and his people. A relative of mine went down and down until he seemed utterly lost and beyond anybody's help. But the Salvation Army reached him and lifted him up and put him on his feet again. Some of us can never forget that, and never be sufficiently grateful. Whenever I meet a Salvationist officer or soldier I think of what we owe to the Army. And I never see a Sal-

vationist taking up a collection," he added, "but I put something in the box."

It was good to hear that six feet and fourteen stone of robust, wholesome manhood, talking about his "little red jersey."

CHAPTER XI

A VISIT TO YPRES

The distraught-looking lunatic asylum—A civic nightmare—Arrested—Taken before the authorities—Permission to look round—A city of brand-new ruins—Shells prettily bursting—Skeleton walls and hillocks of debris—The song of the birds—Inside the wrecked cathedral—Unexploded shells—Looking for the Cloth Hall—A tour of private houses—Pathetic medley of domestic articles—The surviving garden—Corporal Clegg and the wounded bird—Confidences in a church—His Salvationist associations—Ypres by moonlight—My droll predicament.

As my military chauffeur was bumping across mended shell holes, and dodging round the other kind, I espied a silent, smokeless city, and exclaimed:

"What place is this we are coming to?"

"Ypres," replied my preoccupied companion; and it was exciting news.

So, after all, here was I about to enter the famous city, and under conditions ideal for observation, namely, at ten o'clock on a brilliant sunny March morning.

Already were we passing a great building, obviously of recent date, that stood back in its grounds; but instead of forming a straight line, the façade met the sky in a zig-zag of brickwork and masonry dented, holed, and smashed. Breaks and blemishes

also showed lower on the frontage, as also along the enclosing wall beside the road.

I had grown accustomed to shattered country cottages and collapsed farm buildings. Indeed, for days I had moved amid picturesque rural ruins, and my eyes had ceased to be acquainted with buildings in their normal condition—namely, whole, tidy, and inhabited. But this was the first time I had seen a large specimen of modern architecture that had been visited by high explosives. Because the building was bright and new there was something uncannily squalid in the scars and injuries that pitted it. With no movement at chimneys or windows, the great building gaped lifeless in the glare of the sun.

"It's the lunatic asylum," explained my driver; and that is just what it looked like—a building gone mad.

But another fact about that institution came to light when we had left it well behind. The lunatic asylum, probably because of its suburban situation, had not been nearly so badly battered as other institutions of Ypres. We were now entering the city proper, where it looked as though every building, instead of being merely scarred, had suffered severe amputation. One had no roof or chimney stack, half the frontage of another was missing, a third had lost its side wall. Ypres, indeed, was a city of houses that were partly in excellent repair and partly in hopeless ruins; and I was deep in the contemplation of this civic monstrosity—this landlord's nightmare —when some military police stopped the car and demanded to see my papers.

Nor was it many moments before, if not under

arrest, at any rate under compulsory escort, I was taken through a fortification of sandbags and ushered into the presence of a certain officer.

While admitting that my authorisations were influential and comprehensive, he courteously pointed out that I lacked the necessary permit for my passage through the city. To secure that permit, he explained, I must make personal application at a specified office in a certain town less than fifty miles away.

It seemed there were other blemishes in my programme.

"How were you proposing," asked the officer, "to get to the ——th brigade headquarters?"

"The chauffeur promised to drive me as far as he could," was my reply, "and I was going to walk the rest."

"What! in broad daylight?" exclaimed the officer. "Why, you would be under fire nearly all the way. Those headquarters can only be reached after dark."

Whereupon, apologising for the unintentional irregularity of my conduct, and promising to return anon with the necessary document in my possession, I was about to withdraw, when a cheerful looking police sergeant, with a thoughtfulness for which I could not feel sufficiently grateful, turned to his superior, and, in a confidential aside, said:

"Seeing he is here, sir, perhaps there would be no harm in letting him run up and see the Cloth Hall?"

"Oh, all right—give him a guide," rapped out the officer, almost with the air of a man who does

not wish his official right hand to know what his fraternal left hand is doing.

And the military police sergeant summoned a military police corporal, with whom (after informing my chauffeur of the new turn events had taken) I set out on foot, in a state of lively gratitude, to inspect Ypres.

A sunny city of brand-new ruins—such was the scene of our saunter. It was a khaki-coloured city, wondrous picturesque, placid, and (forgive me for saying) peaceful. True, occasional shells were bursting to right and left of us, but they were at any rate bursting very prettily—that is to say, above the artificial dilapidations one sometimes saw (when one happened to be looking in the right direction) either an instantaneous flash or an expanding shape of yellow-white woolliness, suggestive of an aerial polar bear.

After proceeding along several thoroughfares, one had a definite sense of Ypres as an architectural unity—every building being a ruin; and while anything like monotony was prevented by variations of elevation and of structural bulk, adjoining buildings were apt to merge together in a common heap of co-mingled bricks, stone, and mortar. Wherever premises were at all exposed—not merely to the weather, but to certain metal cylinders that travel, swift and invisible, through the weather—those premises had become grey hillocks of ceilings, doors, floors, windows, chairs, tiles, bedsteads, and lime dust; perhaps partly sheltered by some fragmentary skeleton of surviving outer brickwork.

Here and there I saw shutters (protected by a

screen of sandbags) across what had, no doubt, been business premises; but shop fronts were not otherwise visible. Of the baker, the butcher, the ironmonger, and their fellow-tradesmen, there remained no sign. Obviously the Ypres shops had long since been blown to smithereens—smashed, pulverised, and obliterated. And those other accustomed attributes of a city—the pedestrians, the vehicular traffic, the children at play, the dogs and cats—Ypres lacked them also. It was a city without movement, animation, or noise (beyond the occasional boom and rumble of exploding shells).

There appeared to be only two things happening at Ypres—it was being blasted, bit by bit; and many wrens and finches were singing among its ruins.

Never for my ears had the flutings and whistling of little birds been richer in sweetness and significance. Somehow the gentle music seemed to smother the rougher sound, as though eternal wisdom were revealed in contrast to a temporary triviality.

We visited the cathedral of St. Martin—or, rather, the broken skeleton of what once was the cathedral of St. Martin. There still survived jagged and perforated portions of the hard outer case, with here a nobility of design in the arch of a window and there some choice embellishment of stone carving. Otherwise one saw little to indicate a sacred edifice, let alone a noble architectural relic of the thirteenth century.

The early Gothic nave and aisles, the superb rose window, the late Renaissance choir stalls, the altars, fonts, pillars, and tombs—these were nothing but chips, splinters, and dust, piled high in heaps that

we had perforce to climb in getting from one part of the building to another.

Other mounds upon the cathedral floor were formed of cheap furniture, wearing apparel, domestic utensils—aye, and children's toys. For in early days of the bombardment of Ypres, poor citizens, finding themselves in the midst of bursting shells, conveyed their property to the cathedral for safety; and there it remained, all higgledy-piggledy, and thick in dust from the avalanches of shattered masonry that occurred when projectiles hit walls near by.

From the cathedral, concerned to find the Cloth Hall, we set off across the market-place—still a fine open space, though garnished on its margins with huge shell holes, some of which had become reservoirs of rain-water. Also on the debris-strewn edge of that great square we saw an unexploded German shell—of which, indeed, several counterparts were destined to be revealed on our protracted exploration of the city. The least tap—my companion warned me—might cause them to explode; but, however that might be, I felt little temptation to tamper with those faulty canisters of pent-up mischief.

Again we walked along some of Ypres' leading thoroughfares—to wit, more or less open avenues between lines of bruised and crumpled architecture, where gabled Gothic and seventeenth-century façades had been transformed into the general likeness of a disused limekiln.

"Strange!" my baffled companion was presently ruminating, "I've seen the Cloth Hall—and been

in it, too—often enough, though not just lately. What's more, I never had any trouble in finding it before."

Driven at last to the expedient of asking a comrade in khaki, the Corporal learnt—and at once remembered in a flood of self-reproaches—that the Cloth Hall was situated alongside the cathedral. Whereupon we humbly bent our steps (for about the sixth time) to the great market-place, there to make the strange discovery that we had not only seen the Cloth Hall already, but had actually been inside it—so far, at least, as it is possible to be inside a building which has ceased to have a roof, or any structural interior, but is merely an area littered with rubble, and bounded in part by the gaunt relics of what once were walls of classic beauty.

As, unfortunately, neither of us had a map of Ypres, it was largely a matter of guess work to determine where one building ended and another began. But at least, on studying chaos in the light of our new knowledge, I was able to appreciate the conditions of comparative shelter which had allowed one of the cathedral entrances, profusely embellished with carvings of sacred significance, to survive almost intact. A disabled cannon on its limber was picturesquely entangled with the blocks of stone that partly encumbered the entrance archway.

Having now at last finished with the buildings of note, we wandered into a quarter of the city where, because the thoroughfares were narrow, many houses had been less exposed to frontal damage than was the case elsewhere. Doors and windows, it is true, had for the most part been blown in, but

here and there was a house having the ground floor structurally intact, so that we walked through parlours and into kitchens, gazing upon a pathetic litter of papers, pictures, furniture, books, cooking pans, clothing, and miscellaneous domestic objects.

In one doorless house I opened a cupboard, to find on a shelf three rusty door keys. In another I noted upon the floor a child's broken sabot, and balls of crotchet cotton attached to an unfinished doll's garment. In yet a third parlour, where a bedstead hung halfway through a hole in the ceiling, I saw a shattered rocking-horse lying in company with pieces of shrapnel.

But all was not sadness even in those streets of stricken homes. For we came upon a little garden which, because screened by a close succession of thick walls, had been unvisited by shells and unsullied by powdered bricks and mortar. Out of the black soil bright green shoots were sprouting, and in one bed was a glorious clump of daffodils.

And still the sun was shining, still the sky was blue, and still a song of optimism was sounding overhead. But my companion said, rather abruptly:

"I'm surprised at you, sir."

"Why, what have I done?" I asked in consternation, unable to surmise the social delinquency of which he had found me guilty.

"You don't seem to mind the shelling at all," he explained.

"Well, I'm sorry," was my apologetic reply, "but I'm afraid I had forgotten all about it."

"Can't you *hear* it?" he protested.

"I do now. But when you spoke I was listening

to something else. Hark! Don't you know what I mean?"

The Corporal obviously made conscientious but unavailing efforts with his ears.

"Oh, the birds," he was presently echoing. "Yes, they seem in full song, don't they? And that brings to mind something which happened yesterday. I was coming down the next street to this when what should I notice in the roadway but a little bird! You could see it was injured by the way it fluttered; and when I took it up in my hand I found that both its legs had been broken. A shell had, no doubt, done that for the poor little thing."

And there was pain and pity in his voice.

"Now, I mustn't forget," my painstaking guide was presently adding, "to show you a beautiful little church that's not far from here. It hasn't suffered like the others."

For, in our leisurely explorations, he had already taken me to some half-dozen churches and several shrines—most of them in a state of pitiful collapse and disarray—yet in no instance (so far as I had noted) with any harm done to the crucifix.

As we walked towards the church, it chanced that we met a few sight-seeing Tommies, who, like others previously encountered, were obviously in a placid, not to say cheerful, frame of mind. And their smiling faces seemed, with the birds, the sunshine, and the blossoms, to be all links in one golden chain.

On arriving at our new destination, I found that one shell had hit the pulpit, and another had smashed through the roof and gallery; but, speaking gen-

erally, the church was intact. It was the very place for a chat.

And presently my companion was introducing himself as Corporal Clegg, of Stockport.

"No," he smiling admitted, "I'm not a member of the Salvation Army, but I have often played in the Salvation Army band at Stockport. I have a cousin who is a Salvationist, and I never came across a finer woman for living an unselfish life."

"Good. And now I want to go back a bit. You remember saying you were surprised because I didn't mind the shelling? The reason why I don't mind is this; I have a feeling of being safe in God's keeping, and that whether I live or whether I die is a matter in His hands. I came out with the resolve to rely wholly upon Him and not in the slightest degree on myself; and though I have always regarded myself as a bit of a funk, there was not a single moment's uneasiness in looking forward to coming, and, now I am here, there is no fear—in fact, I feel thrills of pleasure in the presence of danger. Why I am saying all this is to see how the matter stands with you. If you noticed that I don't mind the shelling, I also noticed that you don't mind it either. And here you have devoted two hours of leisure to wandering openly about the city when you might have been behind sandbags or safe in a cellar. Now, I want to know if you also are not walking by faith in humble reliance on God?"

"Yes, sir, I am," was the Corporal's emphatic reply; and there was corroboration in his eyes.

"And don't you think," I asked, "that it is a

general experience out here, and that it explains, for instance, the happy expressions of the lads we just passed on the road?"

"I am sure," replied Corporal Clegg with conviction, "that that is so."

However, over two hours having been occupied in our explorations, it behoved me to be moving on; and therefore, after tendering thanks to the Corporal and apologies to the chauffeur, I was soon in the initial stage of what proved a troublesome and protracted business—namely, the procuring of a permit to pass through Ypres.

Not, indeed, until some six hours later was the necessary document in my possession; and so it was well after sundown when, for the second time that day, I presented myself before the officer previously referred to, whom, by the way, I wished to consult about a difficulty that now confronted me.

Divisional headquarters had provided me with a new chauffeur, who said he could carry me no farther than the confines of the city. It seemed he had grown accustomed to the risk of being killed by a shell, but he objected to going into open country which, besides affording unhindered scope for exploding projectiles, was presumably swept by German bullets. Nor, of course, did I seek to alter his decision, though it left me wondering what I was to do about my baggage, which must on no account be left behind.

The courteous officer, on gaining a clue to my predicament, at once told off two men to act as my guides within the limits of his authority. "If they care to take you beyond the city," he added, "I shall

be very pleased for them to do so; but they must decide that point for themselves."

They decided it there and then—their emphatic decision duplicating that already arrived at by the chauffeur.

Thereupon the officer took me on one side, and, with the aid of pencil and paper, afforded such clear indications of my route as, he was confident, would enable me to complete my journey alone and on foot.

A few minutes later, the car, with the two new occupants, was resuming its journey across the city.

Ruined Ypres, bathed in moonlight and mystery, was supremely picturesque. One still heard the boom and bang of shells bursting far and near. The car plunged forward with a sort of muffled precipitancy. No one spoke. We were all staring ahead into the grey light, to see whether a projectile fell in our path.

Here, then, was danger in a romantic setting; and I felt all my senses pleasurably alert. Yet an undignified little personal problem would keep intruding itself.

My baggage could be comfortably carried single-handed for only a few yards at a stretch; and the prospective journey on foot was a matter of mileage.

In imagination I saw a peaceful pedestrian floundering into unknown possibilities and unfamiliar territory, a heavily-laden gladstone bag in one hand and a pair of gum boots in the other—his forward progress constantly interrupted by spells of puffing and blowing.

CHAPTER XII

ADVENTURES BY MOONLIGHT

At brigade headquarters—A benign General—His hospitable offer—Out in the mist once more—My placid escorts—Confidence under fire—The workings of Divine Justice—Mud, rats, and bullets—Meeting sleepy Tommies—White crosses: an optical illusion—The sentry's challenge—Arrival at the dug-outs—The doctor's tidings—A subterranean surgery—Overtaking wounded men—The field hospital—Suspected as a spy—An astonished surgeon.

THE expected ordeal was averted.

We reached open country to find it shrouded in ghostly mist, whereupon my companions conferred privily together; their deliberations issuing so favourably that, on second thoughts, they accompanied me, partly awheel and partly on foot, to the queer-looking structure that proved to be my destination.

I thanked those three lads, and bade them adieu, in a salute which, however defective in military precision, was full of heartiness and sincerity. Then it was my experience to be standing among khaki ghosts in the milky moonlight, with an agreeable sense of having reached another milestone on my journey into the grim unknown.

For note how the civilian's experiences were unfolding themselves in well-defined stages of interest.

To begin with, officers of my first regiment, whose sphere was west of Ypres, had thrown a new glamour over that city by representing it as too unsafe to be visited. Then, from men grown accustomed to Ypres risks, had come mention of superior perils in the open country that I now was traversing.

So far there had been nothing but a quick, quiet journey through a mile or so of silvery haze. But in that atmospheric effect, coupled with a dampness in the night air, and the hush brooding over my new companions, I found something sufficiently impressive. The ear noted, if not new sounds, at any rate sounds heard in a new perspective. Well defined was the spit-spit of rifle fire, but every now and then we heard nothing but a machine-gun's imperious rat-a-tat-tat—like some one knocking on a wooden wall near by.

Subdued Tommies ushered me into a primitive chamber which might in days gone by have witnessed the making of cheese or the baking of bread. At the head of a long table sat an elderly General, whose benign, polished manner lent a dignity to his rude surroundings. Distributed about the apartment were his staff—all young men, whose preoccupations with ink and paper my entrance interrupted. I gathered that people did not often drop in to see them, particularly at that late hour in the evening. All gave the visitor a most fraternal welcome, and soon he was eating cake and drinking mineral water while the genial General smiled upon him and asked questions.

Was I really going that night to the trenches? Wouldn't I accept such a shake-down as it was in

his power to offer? In a word (and he summed up the matter with twinkling eyes), which did I prefer—discomfort or comfort?

My decision was in favour of adhering to the programme laid down for me; and therefore, after inspecting and handling a piece of shrapnel which, it seemed, had that afternoon struck the General's heel, I withdrew in the company of a friendly young subaltern who was instructed to see to my going forth—our preparations including the withdrawal from my luggage of heavy articles that could advantageously be left behind, and the temporary substitution for my gum boots of a pair of military waders.

Nor was it long before the pampered adventurer was setting forth once more into the chill grey mist, accompanied by two lads who, between them, made light of his reduced impedimenta.

There was an educated ring in their quiet voices as they alertly responded to my remarks. They were such boys as the outbreak of war would no doubt have found newly emerged from school—perhaps not yet embarked on commercial or professional life; in a word, middle-class boys in the golden, lawn-tennis phase of existence. And there they were, out in that chill Flanders' mist—guarding the British Empire and human liberty; and guarding them in a spirit which, because typical of our lads at the front, I fain would define.

They spoke with a complacency rendered the more acceptable because of an impersonal note in the things they said. I had been careful to tell them who I was, so that there might be no risk, in the

uncertain light, of their mistaking me for a personage. And certainly they spoke without constraint, as also without a mental pose of any sort, whether in the direction of emphasising, belittling, or burlesquing the dangers amid which they lived. Their manner was free from the slightest suggestion of impatience, frivolity, or fear. It was calm, courteous, sympathetic, and gentle.

I said how sorry I was to be taking them out into the open, when but for me they would doubtless have been enjoying comfortable accommodation under some sort of cover. There was almost a filial note in the assurances they made haste to give me; namely, that it did not matter at all, and that, in fact, they were only too pleased to be of service.

"Excuse me," I interrupted, "but was that a bullet that just went by?" For it was early in the year for cockchafers, and I knew of no other beetle likely to be on the wing at that hour.

"Yes," replied the lad who was carrying my gladstone bag. "That one," he added, in a spirit of mild criticism, "was flying rather high, I think"; and for some moments we advanced in silence.

It seemed strange to be taking that pensive walk through opaque moonlight penetrated by little pieces of lead; still stranger to realise that this was war—not a written-up picture of war, but the reality.

Only for a few yards did our vision have a clear range; and every now and then there came into view, as we advanced, a figure or group of figures in khaki, mostly standing, sometimes sitting, and

in a few cases lying on the ground. And those other lads, as I noted when they spoke with my companions, also were serious and supremely tranquil.

For this is the fact I want to report: those men and lads, like others I had met at the Front, were obviously sustained by a grace that issued from the unerring working of Divine Justice. They had surrendered all the joys of life, and stood prepared to surrender life itself, on the altar of liberty; and could it be otherwise than that they should reach a sure consolation? Moreover, our human perception gropes its way to a recognition of this guiding law of the universe: that joy has its roots in sacrifice, and that the gain is ever in proportion to the giving.

The boy carrying my bag spoke without embarrassment of God's love, and the boy carrying my boots said it was nice to know that death did not matter.

Such, I feel sure, was the subject nearest their hearts. They were living in a sort of golden twilight between time and eternity. For our lads at the Front (it was growing more and more clear) death had the immediate practical importance which belongs to the next thing that is going to happen.

My thoughts were still dwelling on our wonderfully upheld soldiers when we found ourselves proceeding in single file along duck boards, which ran through a region that was a-swim with khaki-coloured mud. A downcast gaze soon became necessary to ensure that one did not step or slip off the narrow and slimy pathway.

"Be careful here, sir," said the leading lad, indicating some tilted boarding, where an unprepared footstep might have involved one's downfall.

I trod cautiously and was safely past the peril when whizz! went a bullet through the wet air—and whizz! went another one.

"Those, I think, were some way to our left," the rear lad quietly explained.

Instead of returning an appropriate reply, I uttered a muffled ejaculation as a large lump of mud to our right went scampering off into the mist—for that was the uncanny impression received by my imagination.

"Rather a sleepy old rat, that," lightly remarked my leader. "There are any number about here."

It was even so. During the next few minutes I saw three more of those khaki-coloured creatures. One nearly brushed against my boots as he blundered across my path. How unnaturally tame a rat must be to run between two human beings walking close together! Fortunately, I conquered an impulse to yell.

Presently we heard footsteps approaching along the duck boards, and next minute were confronting the foremost of a party of Tommies newly emerged from the trenches. In that dim light they almost suggested Arctic explorers, so heavily were they encased in equipment and mud.

To allow them passage, we had to step clear of the duck boards, and stand as best we could on such little hillocks of partial solidity as occurred in the morass. To preserve my balance, I clutched once or twice at a passing arm or shoulder; but so tired

and sleepy were the dear fellows that they said nothing, and did not even turn their heads. They just plodded along, mechanically and in silence.

The pop-pop-pop of the rifles sounded more and more distinct.

"We never spend too much time at this part," soon our leader remarked, as he set an example of accelerated speed.

"What are those lights?" I asked when, we having resumed our former pace, I looked up and thought I saw, on ahead to our left, some luminous patches faintly discernible in the mist.

"There aren't any lights," replied the foremost lad, after directing, as it seemed to me, the most cursory glance in the indicated direction. And he went on to speak about something else.

"Excuse me," I persisted, "but I can distinctly see shimmering lights."

"No, sir," was the lad's prompt and almost peremptory reply; and the other lad broke in with the remark: "We are not far from the lines now."

Obstinately staring into obscurity, I soon knew the pathetic explanation of an optical illusion. We were passing a place of burial for those killed outright in the firing line, and the rows of neat crosses, painted white, had afforded me a vision of refracted moonlight.

A hissing bullet emphasised the situation, which linked up the living lads beside me with those other lads whose memorials lay yonder; and as I thought of the supreme manifestation of self-surrender, now revealed in a double aspect, the light on those crosses seemed like glimpses of glory.

But a new turn was given to my thoughts when for the second time we were brought to a standstill by an imperative "Who goes there?" And let me say that those challenges were by far the most dramatic incidents of our walk. In each case a certain stern sincerity in the sentry's manner contrasted sharply with the formal character of the phrase he uttered. Nay, the inflection of his voice helped me to realise that, under cover of the mist, a spy or trespassing German might be about, and that the sentry must needs act promptly if a questionable visitor hove into view. Fortunately, my companions knew what answer to give, and lost no time in giving it.

On speedily becoming satisfied that they were good men and true, each sentry included me within the scope of his confidence—this being, by the way, an ill preparation for the experience, which befell me later in the evening, of finding myself an object of acute suspicion and apprehension.

But first I must mention that we came to a terrace of dug-outs, at one of which (faced with a door and window of immaculate joinery) we presented ourselves; whereupon the lads withdrew, and I was received by a group of officers, who almost looked as though they had been sitting up for me and would rather have been in bed.

No time was lost in debating whether I should go forthwith into the trenches and spend the night there (an arrangement that would allow of a visit to certain mine craters which, because they offered no cover, could not be inspected by day); or whether I would get a proper night's sleep, and next day

go out with an officer whose duties would take him to the "International" and other recently captured trenches. I agreed to the latter plan, which was the one recommended by my hosts, who next suggested that, as it was past eleven, I might be willing, after partaking of a little refreshment, to turn in for the night.

But before I had made much progress with the cake and oranges, it chanced that the regimental doctor arrived, and soon let fall the tidings that two of their men had just been shot. Whereupon I sought and obtained permission to go and study the procedure of their treatment, a private being told off to act as my guide. Nor had three minutes elapsed before he and I were entering a neighbouring dug-out which, constructed as though to resist earthquakes, was in use as the casualty station—place of first-aid to the wounded.

Members of the staff obligingly explained, and to a certain extent displayed, the resources of that little subterranean surgery, which happened at the moment to be free of patients, the last two having, it seemed, only just departed for the field hospital.

Towards that establishment, accordingly, we ourselves presently set out, the route proving to involve a return journey along the duck boards, and so reintroducing me to scurrying rats, slippery footsteps, flying bullets, and stern sentries.

Early we came upon a party of some half-dozen soldiers resting on a ledge of raised ground; and, a gleam of white bandages arresting my companion's

attention, he inquired of those comrades if we were going right for the field hospital.

"Yes—are you wounded?" came the anxious reply of R.A.M.C. men who were in charge of our two casualties.

Instead of keeping pace with them, we pushed on to anticipate their arrival at the hospital.

Coming at last to the solid-looking ruin that proved to be our destination, we found our way into a brilliantly lighted chamber largely occupied by apparatus of the healing art and by assistants of the surgeon, who himself was not present. My escort uttered some brief explanation to a Corporal, who promptly disappeared into an inner apartment, whence at once issued the following exclamatory remarks, uttered as by a highly-strung man roused from a brief sleep snatched amid incessant toil:

"What! Who is it? A *civilian*! But civilians don't get up here. What does he look like? Who does he say he is? Does he show any papers? Where is he?" And a lithe figure, full of nervous energy, almost sprang into the surgery.

Directing only the briefest glance at me, the newcomer turned to my escort for information as to where, how, why, and when I first got into his company; that phlegmatic young gentleman finding himself subjected to a somewhat bewildering bombardment of questions.

Finally, the surgeon, completely reassured, turned, and not only welcomed me with a charming courtesy, but invited me to await the next cases, and see him dress their wounds.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE TRENCHES

Two typical casualties—Invalids bashfully grinning—Their bullet wounds—Comments of the kindly surgeon—What became of the beef-tea—My night in a dug-out—Mistaken for the Colonel—A terrifying tail—Broken slumbers—An appetising breakfast—Setting forth with the Captain—War landscape—Wading through the trenches—Our men under fire—The dead lad—Bodies in the parapet—A peep at the shattered "International"—Thirty yards from the foe.

STANDING beside the surgeon, I soon was gazing at the two stricken soldiers who, aided by strong supporting arms, arrived on foot.

They did not look like casualties, except that one man showed a helpless left arm, from which the sleeve of his tunic had been cut away, and that the other man had a bandage about his head. For the rest, each healthy pink face wore a placid, slightly apologetic, and distinctly self-conscious expression.

"Well, now," murmured the sympathetic surgeon, when the man with an injured arm was seated under a brilliant light, "a bullet wound, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," replied the grinning invalid; and a minute later the surgeon's keen scissors had removed the slit shirt sleeve and he had withdrawn the first dressings. Thus were revealed two wounds which, although less than half an hour had elapsed since

they were inflicted, had ceased to bleed, showed no inflammation, and were, in fact, already well on the way to heal. The bullet, entering at the vaccinator's favourite muscle, had emerged through the shoulder, and then no doubt continued on its journey—perhaps as one of those that went whizzing by as I walked along the slippery duck boards.

Almost before the surgeon could say what he wanted, assistants were at his elbow with lotions, lint, and other wholesome-smelling means of reducing pain and promoting a speedy recovery; so that soon the wounds were re-dressed and the arm re-swathed. The patient, who all this time had continued to look pleased in a self-depreciatory sort of way, was about to rise; but Science had not quite done with him yet. An area of flesh had to be bared for the anti-tetanus injection.

"Just a little pin-prick," remarked the persuasive surgeon, as he inserted his needle. Then at last the patient winced, though only momentarily; and in another minute he was applying himself with honest zest to a bowl of hot beef-tea.

Meanwhile the second invalid had come under the strong light.

"What! another bullet wound!" exclaimed the surgeon, in that cheerful tone of sympathy which was not without its emollient and curative value.

"Aye," replied the patient, his voice having the same North Country burr as the other man's, and his face wearing much the same sort of bashful grin.

"Some people," remarked the surgeon, after he

had withdrawn the first dressings, "are pretty lucky, don't you think?"

"Aye," agreed the patient, still grinning.

Adroit sponging had laid bare a wound some two inches long, and showing about half an inch of scalp grooved out at the deepest part.

"Your old head," continued the surgeon, as he applied soothing fluids with a touch of infinite delicacy, "has had a knock before to-day?"

Which remark received the immediate confirmation:

"Aye—a loomp o' coal. I'm a miner."

Then the surgeon asked for a razor and (after slyly explaining to me that he had to be a barber as well as a policeman) set about shaving his patient's head in the region of the wound. When the blade, wielded so expertly, passed along an edge of the cranium cavity, I glanced at the miner's profile, which remained a picture of good-tempered fortitude.

With merely a passing squirm at the hypodermic injection, he reached the stage of receiving his basin of beef-tea; then, the pain and strain overcoming him at last, he put down the untasted food and had to be conducted to sleeping quarters.

Nor was it long before, having thanked the kindly surgeon, I departed with my phlegmatic guide, who had, meanwhile, with great presence of mind, and acting entirely on his own initiative, consumed the derelict basin of beef-tea.

The outside world remained what it had been—that is to say, cloudy moonlight illumined a damp mist, which prevented any one seeing any one else

outside a radius of some half-dozen yards; and, walking along slimy duck boards, we had once more to run the gauntlet of sentries, rats, and flying bullets.

It was past midnight, but the war was still going on, even though—whether or no because of the lateness of the hour I cannot say—distant shelling had ceased, and machine-guns were silent, leaving the everlasting staccato of rifle fire in undisputed possession of the field of sound.

On returning to the dug-out, I found two of the officers still sitting up for me; and they were soon addressing themselves to the question of how my comfort could best be secured. It seemed that their apartment (which served as the officers' mess-room) had been allocated to my exclusive use as a sleeping chamber. A blanket already lay along a seat built out from the wall below the window; and one of the officers, as an old campaigner, recommended the following procedure as likely to ensure a good night's rest: that, before retiring, I should take off my boots, and that I should not only remain in all my clothes, but put on, over my own overcoat, his still warmer one, the loan of which he accordingly pressed upon me.

Then, bidding me make free with what was left on the table, they withdrew, and their visitor was left alone, with full opportunity to take stock of his surroundings.

My imagination had often made guesses as to what it would feel like to spend the night in a dug-out; but the anticipation was now seen to have had little in common with the reality. Instead of hav-

ing to put up with conditions suggesting the combined experiences of a miner and a rabbit, I found myself in a well-proportioned and well-lighted apartment which, with its art shade of canvas wall hangings and its simple oak furniture, had quite a Tottenham Court Road air about it. The coal stove gave out welcome warmth, and, drawing a chair to the table, the civilian applied himself to cake, fruit, and mineral water with a keen appreciation of the most luxurious quarters that he had occupied since leaving the base.

Having presently extinguished the lamp and lit a couple of candles, I was about to adopt a recumbent position when two knocks came at the door; and the next minute, peering out into the mist, I learnt from a pleasant-spoken private that his battalion had just arrived, and that, if quite agreeable, his O.C. would like to drop in and have a chat with me. Not for long, however, was I able to entertain an exaggerated view of my own importance; for the lad, clearly surprised at my surprise, added that he presumed I was the Colonel.

Having undeceived that hasty reasoner, I pointed out, for what my opinion might be worth, that it was a little late to be paying calls, and that his O.C. would be well advised, as it seemed to me, if he deferred his visit till the morning.

Left alone once more, I was soon lying snugly in my cocoon of overcoats, a book in my hand, and the candles by my side. But when one is feeling supremely peaceful, thinking is more congenial than reading. I tried to realise that fortune had at last smiled upon my dreams, and that there I was in

the firing line of the greatest war the world had ever known. But one had no evidence on the subject except (for I listened carefully) the incessant pop-pop of rifle fire in the very back garden, as it seemed.

Yet stay—what was that other sound? Alas! an unmistakable scratching behind the canvas hangings. There remained a vivid memory of those large, bold rats seen earlier in the night, and my cranium was visited by a cold sensation.

Blowing out the lights, I sought oblivion in sleep; only, however, to start up a little later on hearing a squeak and a scuffle within a few inches of my head. I lit a candle and sat watching an aperture where, in the angle of the wall, one stretch of canvas failed to meet another stretch of canvas. Presently my staring eyes caught the wiggle of an unmistakable tail. Then in dismay I beheld receptacles for food on the window sill. My face had been in a direct line between the biscuit box and the place where that tail had appeared.

It was enough. No more window seat for me. And, unfortunately, the room did not offer an alternative couch. At last, however, with my head on a box beside the stove, and my body stretched across two chairs, I tried again. But a hard bed is painful, and a hard bed on which one has no room to turn is purgatory.

Soon after blowing out the light I realised that rats would be likely to come down the chimney. Then it occurred to me that they would be sure to want to eat the candles, which were lying near my face. A Tommy had recently told me of a

friend whose lip was bitten by a rat. Striking another light, I got out my mackintosh cape and wrapped up my head in that.

Shortly after dawn a little sleep came; but the lodger was not feeling very refreshed when an orderly entered to tidy up the place and lay the cloth for breakfast.

"No, sir," he was soon remarking, "they weren't rats. What you heard was mice. I've noticed 'em myself when I've slept here."

Alas and alack! For I am not afraid of mice.

However, it was too late to mend my broken night; nor did time serve for vain regrets. My companions of the previous night were soon arriving.

For breakfast we had porridge, eggs and bacon, coffee, strawberry jam, a clean tablecloth, and good appetites; and during the meal I became acquainted with a cavalry Captain, and wearer of the D.S.O., who, it seemed, was going to take me into the trenches.

Having paraded a working party (equipped with various means of making and repairing trenches), the Captain dispatched them by one route and himself made ready to go forth, with a Lieutenant and myself, by another; our departure being somewhat delayed by the task, in which several friendly hands co-operated, of establishing me in my borrowed military waders—boots having uppers reaching to one's waist.

After following a path cut into the side of a hill, we crossed an area of what had no doubt once been agricultural land, though whether pasture, arable, or orchard, could not readily be divined. It

was a typical bit of war landscape; and war landscape is a phenomenon that cannot be adequately imagined by a person who has not seen it. Other landscapes reveal Nature in beautiful moods, whether placid or stern. The war landscape suggests Nature in an ugly, distraught mood. Picture a derelict brickfield that has been subjected to earthquakes, and on which are trees that have been struck by lightning, and you will have an idea of the ground we were crossing. They told me the pretty name by which it was called; but whether the name echoed past charms, or had been conferred in irony, I did not gather.

My next experience was more thrilling than a vision of blasted scenery. Coming upon a big groove, gutter, or channel cut in the earth, the Captain entered therein, and we followed; a dozen paces bringing us to tolerably uniform dimensions in the excavation—ample shoulder room, with a depth of about five feet.

And so I found myself at last in the trenches—the trenches, which, more primitive than the average contrivances of untutored savages, have become the most important factor in our advanced modern world, and the point at which human fears and hopes are mainly focussed.

I have since traversed several different forms of trenches, some of scientific construction and stylish finish. Owing to an unfavourable combination of meteorological, military, and geological conditions, that particular trench was (as I was afterwards to realise) a pretty poor specimen. It suggested—nay, it duplicated—one of the deep, broad drains

dug across marshy land. It was certainly acting as a drain, in a sluggish sort of way. While not containing enough water to meet the requirements of a swimmer or an angler, it contained too much to admit of ordinary progress even by persons having their legs wholly encased in india-rubber.

It would not have mattered if the water had been only some two or three feet deep, or on a hard bottom. Sometimes the bottom was soft mud, which, having received one's boots, endeavoured to retain them by the power of suction. Even more to be dreaded were certain holes of which the Captain warned the Lieutenant and the Lieutenant warned me; the Captain's topographical knowledge, which was obviously comprehensive and intimate, being subject to correction or amplification by soldiers on duty along our route.

Of those soldiers my mind received two impressions. One was of their helpfulness, as illustrated by a watchful readiness, where necessary, to direct our footsteps into a path of safety. The other impression was of their unobtrusiveness. Sons of cobblers and sons of clergymen; merchants, students, milkmen; men from the universities and lads from the slums—there they were, all clumsily enveloped in khaki, all bedabbled with clay, and all apparently in a blissful state of self-effacement. They were linked together by a common bond of unqualified altruism, and, incidentally, they were affording a triumphant vindication of the essential brotherhood of man.

Presently it became a feature of our walk that the Captain should every now and then remark,

"Better bend a bit here, if you please"; and his six feet or so of magnificent manhood set an example of spinal curvature. The farther we went, the more occasion was there for stooping, we having come into a region where, some eight days before, a protracted tornado of exploding shells had done more mischief than there had since been time thoroughly to repair.

What with the inconvenience of floundering about in muddy water, and the strain on the small of one's back, the situation might, under ordinary circumstances, have grown irksome. But physical discomfort merely assisted a realisation of one's privilege in being there to share, for a few hours, perils and hardships which, often in far sterner degrees, our glorious lads face so cheerfully for months together.

Here and there a ton or so of clay had been scooped out of the side, above the water level, and the recess thus formed, with or without a sack hung over the entrance, made an acceptable sleeping chamber. Often, indeed, protruding legs occurred as mild obstructions across our path.

In a stretch of trench where, because of a rising gradient, the bottom was merely muddy, I came across a lad who, with his back leaning against one side and his feet against the other, had succeeded in going to sleep in an upright position. The Captain set a fine example by his care in getting by without disturbing that slumberer. The adaptable lad seemed, judging by the placid face that hung over his chest, to be having the happy dreams he doubtless deserved.

From this point the ground became dry under foot, but so battered and irregular were the brows of the trench that a stooping attitude had to be maintained. And soon we were encouraged in our caution by a sight full of beautiful pathos. Wrapped in a blanket, and placed ready for removal on a stretcher, lay the body of a lad who, a short half hour before, had stood quietly and contentedly at the post of duty with those other quiet and contented lads, his friends and comrades, whom we found on the spot.

I wondered if the father and mother in an English suburban villa—for imagination pictured the matter thus—could have desired for their darling boy a more triumphant passing into his Home in the Beyond. For the lad who dies in the trenches has lived in an atmosphere of penitence, goodness, and preparation, and has the supreme act of willing self-surrender standing to his credit.

Shooting having been indicated, I ought perhaps to mention that there was the crackle of continuous rifle fire in the foreground, so to speak, of our hearing, and the intermittent booming of shell fire in the background, with grenade explosions occurring every now and then in the middle distance.

"And now," the Captain was presently saying, "you must be prepared for rather a gruesome sight."

But a burial party had been busy since, on the previous afternoon, he last visited that spot; and no piteous relics of the dislodged enemy were to be seen. But we came to where a Sergeant, indicating an embankment of loose earth, said:

"There are three Germans in there, sir. What shall we do with them?"

"Add more earth," directed the Captain, "and put up a temporary cross. That is all we can do at present."

There had been much curving and turning in our course, and presently we came to a trench (running at right angles to the one we were traversing) of which the parapets were reduced to a shapeless disorder of crumpled clay. That trench would have afforded cover to a man only if he had crawled on his hands and knees—which, with the bottom covered with several inches of water, would not have been an agreeable performance.

"That," explained the Captain, "is the so-called 'International' trench which was captured last week. It is not very much used at present during daylight."

We cautiously advanced still farther along recently captured trenches until, sitting down on a piece of timber, and bidding me do likewise, the Captain pointed to a ridge of clay which obstructed our view, and said:

"That is all there is between us and the Germans, who are not more than thirty yards away."

CHAPTER XIV

NO-MAN'S-LAND

The soothing front line—Peeping over the parapet—Dead earth—Periscope pictures—Significant streaks of shadow—Tins and tatters—Military scavengers—Sunshine and a skylark—Tommy's comforters—What the birds were saying—German trenching tools—Other interesting relics—Waterproof fire-lighters—Watching an aerial battle—The stricken plane—Back in the open—Barred by falling shells—The "burst" described—An inconvenient alternative.

THE Captain and I had the place to ourselves, and a more peaceful spot for a chat no one could desire. Nor is it easy to see why (unless through the operation of some subtle law of paradox) one should have been visited, there of all places in the world, by a sense of almost sedative tranquillity. Less than a stone's throw away, with only a few barrow-loads of clay as an intervening shield, was the mighty Prussian military machine, which must be credited, no doubt, with an earnest abstract desire to kill, not only my military associate, but also my civilian self. On the other hand, there was I (very likely the Captain was in better case) unprovided with so much as an umbrella wherewith to defend myself; and I must confess to a momentary curiosity as to the probable course of events if that military machine were suddenly to let loose its power and fury

against us, or, at any rate, if some of its more venturesome spirits were to scramble on to the level or come vaulting over the afore-mentioned modest earthworks into our laps.

"Ah!" said the smiling Captain, when I put the suggestion before him, "I only wish they would try it on."

And having let slip the word "level," in allusion to that narrow belt of land occurring between the hostile front trenches, I must hasten to explain that, so far as surface conditions were concerned, no word could be more grossly inapplicable.

Grass hillocks we know. Sand dunes we know. Ploughed land we know. But they reveal elements of symmetry and uniformity, and that fire-swept belt of No-Man's-Land was wholly unlike any of them. It had been smitten, crumpled, lashed, uptorn, and scarified by cascades of exploding shells, until its surface of lawless irregularity found no parallel in the aspect either of land in any accustomed condition or of water in any familiar state of disturbance, whether as a whirlpool, cataract, or tempestuous sea. It was a landscape desolate and dead, without leaf or grass-blade—indeed, one could not but suppose that even the worms and seeds had been involved in the general doom.

Mind you, I did not find out all this by peeping over the parapet. My survey was made more discreetly.

Some fifty yards back we had come upon an officer taking observations through a periscope, and he had courteously placed the instrument at my disposal. Thus I had my first vision of a paradoxical

region which, while it looks to be as lonely and empty as Crusoe's uninhabited isle, happens to be no less densely populated than a congested city. In that first revelation of the enemy's front, the only outstanding features were gaunt relics of trees that had been murdered and maimed. For the rest, it was a khaki-coloured foreground of clay in the chaotic and blasted condition just alluded to—a foreground wherein the German advanced line was distinguishable as a cutting that held a dark streak of shadow. Moreover, in front of that streak of shadow was a squalid higgledy-piggledy of tins and tatters that had been flung over the parapet to get them out of the way—discarded articles that did not stand forth conspicuous by any distinction of colour or tone, but which, having been churned up with the landscape by high explosives, had become muddied over by the clay in which they were partly embedded.

Not, however, that the image in the periscope enabled me to grasp all that detail. But a minute later, without the aid of reflectors, I saw, on the other side of the trench, a belt of clay which, if not actually No-Man's-Land, had been No-Man's-Land eight days before, and had not since undergone alteration. At least, some trifling modification had now begun on the farther fringe, where a party of Tommies were engaged, like scavengers on a dust shoot, in abstracting from the earth the muddiest of rags and nondescript oddments. That at any rate represents the impression made upon the eye by articles of equipment which had been buried by

bombardment, but which, it seemed, would be once more serviceable when cleaned and renovated.

So much for what may be called the shady side of my impressions. Now for the sunshine. And, to begin with, the sun was literally shining out of a deep blue sky. But, more important, a lark floated overhead—and this was a fact that held my attention—singing a leisurely full-throated carol.

Strange, the trenches had been associated in one's mind merely with thoughts of tribulation, danger, and sudden death (under each of which heads I certainly had found ocular evidence); but when one arrived at the foremost trench of all, the dominant circumstance, because the circumstance making strongest appeal to one's senses, was that a skylark was blithely singing against the azure heavens.

And such birds are constantly doing so, the Captain told me.

How nice for our happy-hearted lads in the trenches! Who could doubt that, by spiritual "wireless," messages were passing from that bird to those boys?

You will vainly scan official communiqués for any mention of skylarks fluttering and fluting over the trenches, it being assumed, no doubt, that the presence and utterances of those birds can have neither military nor political significance. Certain it is, however, that their presence and utterances make a strong appeal in the domain of human interest, which is wider than that of arms or politics.

After the Captain and I had listened awhile in grateful silence, we resumed our exploration of the trench, and soon came to a party of lads and

N.C.O.'s, several of whom, I noticed, stood with smiling, upturned faces, drinking in sunshine and the song of another lark, poised immediately above them.

If the notes of such birds communicate a thrill in times of security and peace, how much greater the scope of their magic under opposite conditions. Think of the restricted opportunities of those who for our sakes live day after day in an underground prison, with little to look at but walls of clay and a sky either empty of variety or merely holding the remote interest of clouds. Then think how delighted those prisoners must be when in the void overhead a little bird comes and sings to them—a little minstrel-messenger from home. For to listening Tommy the skylarks sing, not in French, but in the plainest of plain English. And their songs tell him about his home, his holidays, and the dear ones whose present and future security he is safeguarding. Nor do the birds confine themselves to those topics. They lift his thoughts to higher planes of consolation, and reiterate the assurance that, despite war and wounds, death and sorrow, all is well with the world.

But presently my attention was called to the ground level. The Captain picked up, and handed to me, the trenching tool of a German soldier—a tool which, in size, was a compromise between a spade and a trowel, and which, besides being of no use as a pick, could not be carried so easily as the English tool made in two parts. That little alien spade, however, was noteworthy for its structural strength, the sturdy ash handle being firmly

fixed in a double collar of steel, and the shoulders of the blade being of two fold thickness and heavily riveted.

"If you like," said the thoughtful Captain, "you can keep it as a souvenir."

But my eager acquiescence was interrupted by a cheerful lad who, proffering me another German trenching tool, said:

"Perhaps you would sooner have this one, as I think it is rather a better specimen."

Nor was his judgment at fault. The handle, instead of being of uniform thickness throughout, ended in a knob (on which, by the way, the letter "W" had been roughly carved).

I thanked the lad and profited by his friendly intervention.

Rummaging about in the mud, the Captain and I afterwards found other articles that the former occupants of the trench had left behind them.

One was a round metal box with a hinged lid, which, when open, disclosed fixed contents covered by wire gauze, suggesting that those contents were destined to be saturated with a fluid giving off fumes available either for heating or for healing. This mysterious little apparatus supplemented a mask, the Captain said, as a remedy against gas. From the interior, when at last I had succeeded in prising it out, there dripped a liquid which caused deep discoloration in a pool of muddy water.

I was better able to appreciate the ingenuity shown in another contrivance of which we found several examples. I refer to German fire-lighters. Much rain had recently fallen, and the trenches

thereabouts held a quantity of water; so, instead of wrestling with the problem of how to keep their fuel dry, our foes had provided themselves with waterproof combustibles. Sticks saturated with bitumen, accompanied by strips of celluloid, were swathed in shavings, the whole being bound together by a covering of wire netting. Such fuel could be in water one minute and in a blaze the next; and note that, instead of this inflammable bundle swiftly flaring away through falling apart, its mechanical cohesion ensured slow combustion. Truly a bright idea.

Suddenly my attention was recalled to regions aloft. A group of aeroplanes were in view, being attended, as usual, by those puffs of woolly whiteness that glow so prettily, like dainty little cumulus clouds. And here perhaps I may mention that the sight of such aircraft manœuvring overhead, and apparently not caring twopence for the shells sent up after them, had been of daily occurrence—it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say, of hourly occurrence—during the succession of fine days I had spent at the Front; with the result that an exhibition which at first was fascinating enough, had by repetition lost the power to hold my attention. True, a brisker interest was always stimulated when, instead of shells, opposition took the form of rival planes; and the air battle under consideration swiftly developed that character.

No schoolboy could have been more interested than was my friend the Captain. He brought his glasses to bear on the affair, and was soon making noteworthy discoveries.

"That's a fine machine just coming up," he was presently exclaiming. "How wide the wings are, and what a pace she is going at! Have a look at her;" and most obligingly he handed me his glasses.

Making conscientious efforts to get that machine into the field of vision, I soon had a delightful surprise, and could not refrain from exclaiming:

"How prettily her wings are fluttering! And she is remaining quite stationary!"

"What!" exclaimed the Captain.

But I had happened upon the skylark, which was still singing joyously, air-fight or no air-fight.

Yet not for long could the civilian share the skylark's detached standpoint.

"Ha!" cried the Captain, "she's hit! Do you see? That fine British plane heading right in among the Boches. Look! she has turned. It was splendid audacity, but I feared she would pay the penalty. She's a long way across the lines, unfortunately. Badly hit, apparently. See how quickly she's falling. Hard lines. She'll never be able to get back. Yet I don't know—perhaps there's just a chance!"

Those around us were exclaiming in unison with the Captain—hopes and fears alternating in each breast. A novel sensation was involved in watching those thrilling hazards in the constricted position our situation necessitated. It was almost a case of looking up with one's head ducked. For we were at a part of the trench where the parapet was low. To stand erect on gazing aloft (as was the natural impulse) would be, humanly speaking, to court a death-dealing wound in the head. So we all had

perforce to maintain a stooping or squatting posture while following the fortunes of the aeroplane.

Its angle of descent had carried it far from the other flying machines.

"Ha! she's done it!" exclaimed the Captain as the wounded plane slid out of sight. "She'll land on our side after all!"

Whereupon, bidding farewell to friends of a few thrilling moments, he and I continued our return journey through the trenches, from which we eventually emerged at the place of our original entrance.

Two minutes later, while we were recrossing the ugly stretch of open country that had the pretty name, something happened which, though it must have been a commonplace and humdrum incident in those parts, interested me not a little.

To certain grating noises overhead I should no doubt have been paying more attention had the Captain's conversation made less claim on my attention. As it was, the thought of shells was entirely absent from my mind when one burst less than a hundred yards ahead of us.

For me the occurrence presented three aspects of special interest. Firstly, my imagination was fascinated by the fact that the explosion had taken place directly in our path—that in a few moments our footsteps would have been in the midst of the boisterous upheaval our eyes had just witnessed.

In the second place, my attention was engaged by the nature of that upheaval. I saw a huge, black, circular, up-pouring of smoke and (definitely visible) earth. On a sudden, under pressure of the explo-

sion, the ground had become fluid. That was the striking fact—soil and sub-soil rose in jets and fountains. The shell had gone splashing into solids.

Thirdly, I realised at a gasp that, if one's material self were amid that violent escape of upward-flying force, not so much as a waistcoat button would be likely to remain as a recognisable relic.

As we stood watching the peaceful spot where that commotion had just occurred, another shell fell in much the same place, and again there was a huge cascade of mould, clay, grass, and roots.

"Bah!" exclaimed the Captain; and I was surprised at the note of petulance. "We want to get by there."

"Can't we go round another way?" I ventured. "Or wait till the shells stop coming?"

"Wait till they stop!" cried the Captain. "Not unless we want to lose our lunch!"

"But what is the idea in dropping them there?" I asked, beginning in turn to feel rather cross with certain unknown German artillerymen.

"You see that bit of an old barn over there?" (I duly took note of a crumpled hillock of tiles, rafters, and brickwork.) "Well, they've got an idea that it masks a British battery, though as a matter of fact there isn't a gun anywhere near. I've heard of our fellows being pulled up like this before," he indignantly added.

Fortunately there were Tommies within hail, and, on being appealed to by the Captain, they indicated an alternative route by which we could reach our destination.

Whereupon we turned off at a tangent, and were

soon treading duck boards which, by reason of their quaking foundation and slimy surface, afforded a foothold that was doubly treacherous. So one had to exercise a vigilant caution at every step.

Thud! A third shell went exploding into mother earth; and I appealed to the Captain—was it fair for them to go on firing when we could not possibly look round to see?

The Captain's guffaw did not smother the sound of a fourth explosion.

And so it went on. The Germans were making a mistake, but they were making it thoroughly.

CHAPTER XV

UNDER SHELL FIRE

An Easter reminder—My Yorkshire guide: typical unselfishness—A treat for stranded aviators—Ypres in a new aspect—Shell holes galore: a landscape with the smallpox—Watching a frog—The foundered biplane—Projectiles *en route:* streaks of grating noise—Bursting shells—Our narrow escape—Waiting at the roadside: a trying experience—The deafening British battery—Mysterious absence of a limber—Dodging the shells: a lad's startling manœuvre—Tranquil Tommies—Our tramp along the road—Bad language: an exceptional experience—Welcome eggs and chips.

In that landscape of blasted vegetation I chanced to espy, against a stream behind some dug-outs, a sapling willow having branches aglow with golden catkins. And when he saw me plucking a button-hole, the Captain cut a bunch to take back to the Colonel.

But I was not destined to sit at a palm-decked table.

In our absence, it appeared, the wires had been asking me questions.

The motor car having broken down, would I mind returning from Brigade Headquarters on horseback? That was the delayed interrogation that first demanded attention.

A poor horseman, with no recent experience in

the saddle, I was not drawn to the idea of being inconveniently perched with my luggage on the back of some mettlesome quadruped, particularly as bursting shells might cause the sensitive creature to plunge and uprear. So my answer was an inquiry whether Brigade Headquarters could make any alternative suggestion; which was replied to in the further question—Would I object to journeying on a limber?

Having received the assurance that, so far from objecting, I should be proud to find myself on such a vehicle, Brigade Headquarters flashed me the final request: Would I mind returning with all convenient speed?

So, having taken a hearty farewell of the Colonel, the Captain, and my other kind hosts, I soon found myself proceeding once more over the ground with which, in its moonlight aspect, I had become familiar enough over-night. But I am not able to say what projectiles were this time passing through the atmosphere, my attention being fully engaged with the young Yorkshire lad who acted as escort and carried my bag.

Obviously in obedience to orders, he insisted on rapid walking. For the rest, his mind yielded pleasant confirmation of the human evidence on which I had already happened. Quiet and thoughtful in manner, he was soon dumbfounding me with surely the prettiest little speeches that a soldier boy ever addressed to a civilian senior.

It seemed he considered it meritorious that a person who had outgrown the period of early manhood, and upon whom accordingly there rested no obligation of military service, should have volun-

tarily entered the area of discomfort and peril. Young chaps, he held, were in an altogether different position, because—apart from the fact that it was their duty to defend the Empire—they naturally found in the war a congenial outlet for their strength, vigour, and high spirits.

The obvious blemish in this argument, of course, was that he could not possibly be enjoying his stay at the Front more than I was enjoying my visit there; but before opportunity served for this to be pointed out, he drew from his pocket the battered nose of a German shell and diffidently asked me if I would like it. My answer was an eager affirmative, coupled with the statement that I was wanting to buy such things as souvenirs; to which he replied that he could not sell me any, but that I need not hesitate to accept the one he offered, as he could easily get another.

From which we see that this lad soared above his material conditions and figured as an attractive and a gracious personality; for a person's nobility is ever in proportion as he is solicitous for the interests of others and indifferent to his own. It may be, of course, that he was such a one as, in former times of peace, would have been equally concerned to please and benefit a complete stranger thrown for a few minutes into his company; but at any rate his mental attitude was, so far as my own experience went, typical of our lads at the Front, whom I everywhere found arrayed in the splendour of unselfishness, and with a smile upon their lips.

At Brigade Headquarters I was received by the young officer who had previously dealt with me. He

counselled speed in the readjustment of my luggage, since it was important that I should arrive by one o'clock at an indicated part of a specified road, when and where, it seemed, the limber would await me.

"It's a shame, though," he was presently remarking, "that you cannot stay to lunch, as you would meet a couple of airmen who have just been driven down."

"In a biplane, half an hour ago?" I eagerly inquired.

"Yes; there was a big scrap. Did you see it?"

I told him how some of us had a splendid view from the Bluff.

"Then you must spare a moment to come and be introduced," insisted the young officer; and, entering the apartment where lunch was set, I found two beaming young aviators warming themselves before a fire.

"Hurt? Not a bit of it," one was soon assuring me. "A small scratch—that's all."

I explained how interested we had been in the encounter, and how much we deplored their bad luck.

"Our *good* luck, more like it!" chimed in the other aerial adventurer. "Why, we got the information we went for; our machine is not hurt; we're all right; and" (here he turned smilingly to the onlooking subalterns), "they've promised, now we're here, to let us have a look at the trenches—which is just what we've been wanting to do for a long time. So we reckon we're jolly lucky."

And so, indeed, they were, though not till some

ten minutes later was I in a position fully to appreciate their good fortune.

Meanwhile the young officer had sent me forth with two scouts, who carried my belongings between them.

In one direction lay Ypres. We started off in another, but not before our glimpse of the city had impressed a new image upon my mind.

In the bright sunshine, walls, roofs, and towers looked clean, new, and conspicuous. And yet, strangely enough, the city's distinctness was a proof of its doom. There was no chimney smoke to dim the atmosphere; and a city of cold chimneys is necessarily a dead city. Moreover, an occasional shell-burst over the houses supplied the imagination with a further clue to the uninhabited condition of Ypres.

Not that the German artillery was by any means confining its attention to the city.

We were crossing a field that was pitted with shell holes of various sizes, many containing water. Stopping beside a cluster of them, I saw a little frog clamber out of one round swimming bath, and, after traversing a few intervening inches of dry land, plunge into another. It seemed a pathetically risky place for a poor little unsuspecting yellow frog to be taking amphibious exercise in.

But the boys did not encourage natural history observations. We had only a quarter of an hour, they pointed out, in which to reach our rendezvous; and they were agreed that, if we failed to be there to time, the limber would be unlikely to wait for us. On demurring to this view, I was informed that the section of road to which we were bound

was, because so frequently shelled, unpopular with the drivers of vehicles.

On we went again across an area which suggested peaceful sylvan scenery and the infernal regions, intimately mixed. Trees and hedges were broken and shorn, and everywhere the ground was disfigured by craters—a land with the smallpox. Nor must it be assumed that the bombardment of that locality was a mere affair of the past. It was also an affair of the present.

The reader will remember that high explosives had been brought under my personal notice earlier in the day. Opportunity was now afforded for a closer study, in various interesting aspects, of the dangerous contrivances which rival nations see fit to discharge at one another. Indeed, shells and their ways made so strong a claim on my attention that when, in a little space surrounded by trees, we beheld a great biplane at rest, I spared only a passing thought to the airman's cause for gratitude in having achieved, amid those encircling perils, a safe landing.

We could see shells (as occasionally they burst in the air away to the right or the left), and—which came to be by far the more impressive experience—we could hear them travelling. One can express it not otherwise than that they were passing overhead in straight lines of sound—in straight, harsh, grating lines of sound. The din suggested thunder, except that claps do not follow definite tracks. It further suggested a magnified version of the process of moving furniture in a room upstairs, except that bedstead and wardrobe do not betray

an even momentum sustained over miles of progress. For note that, not only did the sound of a hurtling shell assume the character of a line, but that line revealed itself in perspective. You distinctly heard the invisible projectile coming from far away, journeying noisily overhead and continuing onward with fading audibility. Sometimes one heard two proceeding along parallel routes.

Shells were going in both directions (for not only was the enemy firing at us, but we were firing at the enemy), and every now and then they could be heard passing one another. Also, the German shells came from different directions (for we were inside a salient), their routes seeming to converge a little way ahead of us. There came, indeed, to be a skein of invisible lines of noise in the heavens.

On the concluding stage of our walk we saw shells bursting above a shattered homestead, some hundred yards or so to our left. Over Ypres on our right we also saw the pretty puffs of woolliness. But most of the shells travelled beyond our ken.

As, two minutes ahead of appointed time, we drew near to the road, I found a double claim on my attention.

"No sign of any limber!" remarked one of the lads; and indeed the roadway was empty.

"H'm!" murmured the other lad, as he glanced over his shoulder, "it's just as well we've got past there."

Between the two remarks there had been a resounding explosion, and I turned in time to see the black smoke that came from a shell-burst. But the

point of interest was that the explosion had occurred only about eighty yards behind us, on ground we were traversing a minute before.

A quiet smile played on the face of the lad who had noted the explosion. The other lad continued to be interested in the non-arrival of my limber. He opined (and his comrade agreed) that it would soon appear.

Then we began patiently waiting by the side of the road.

A quarter of an hour later we were still waiting there, if less patiently. In the meantime there had been certain developments.

For one thing, the space over our heads had to an increasing degree been striated with streaks of grating sound, and several shells had exploded within sight. For another thing, a British battery had opened fire a little way up the road.

After the first deafening roar, there hung in the air a gigantic ring of smoke.

"That's given away the position," deplored one of my companions (and, indeed, hostile aircraft had but recently been visible). The battery continued at intervals to emit shells and uproar (though no more rings), and thus the coming of retaliating projectiles in our vicinity might be expected.

The situation was something worse than unsatisfactory. To shift our ground would be to risk missing the limber; besides, there did not seem much to choose, so far as grim possibilities were concerned, between one spot and another. I also felt debarred from moving off altogether, because my destination was a town several miles away, and to jour-

ney there on foot, carrying so much baggage, was too heroic an undertaking for me to enter upon alone. Nor had I any right to enlist the two lads into such an enterprise. As it was, my conscience smote me for the plight in which I had unwittingly involved them. For, as bad luck would have it, they had been on the point of sitting down to dinner when their services were requisitioned on my behalf. Both went on smiling and chatting with sustained serenity; but full well I knew that two such strong and healthy young fellows, following so strenuous an open-air existence, would have a zest for their meals, and must now be suffering pangs of hunger. Truth to tell, sensations nearer home assisted my insight into the case of those lads. For circumstances had also defrauded me of my lunch.

It was the one occasion when the danger affected me with a feeling of distaste and apprehension. But this emotion was closely associated with a resentment of the state of inertia to which the non-arrival of the limber condemned me. It had been easy, nay exhilarating, to walk and drive amid perils; but to be standing passive so long in such a situation, and to feel oneself left in the lurch, with no means of escape, proved another matter altogether. It was trying to the nerves. I itched to be on the move.

Amid numerous conjectures as to why the limber had failed us, a prominent place was taken by the misgiving that, falling into a common error, the driver might be awaiting us half a mile farther on, at a bend in the road frequently confused with the bend where we were stationed.

One boy at last went off to put this supposition to the proof. But half an hour later he returned shaking his head. It seemed he had seen no sign of any limber.

"All I saw," he smilingly explained, "was a wheel lying in a ditch"; and indeed by this time a hypothesis finding some favour was that a shell had prevented the limber keeping its appointment.

But, however that might be, I had had about enough of standing inert under that canopy of travelling and bursting projectiles; the exhaustion of my patience having no doubt been assisted by a little incident that occurred while the lad was gone on his vain quest.

Suddenly the other boy, with whom I had been enjoying the most placid of chats, was possessed by a spirit of feverish activity. Out flew his hands against the stump of a telegraph pole beside which we stood. With a wild leap he swung half way round the black wooden column. Then he crouched to earth.

Nor had I been in any doubt as to the meaning of this manœuvre. It, however, found me unprepared. My companion was, indeed, up and apologising while I still hesitated about following his example.

These and other lads had told me that, after a few weeks' experience under fire, one can hear if a shell be about to come down in one's vicinity. The ear detects a lessening of its pace, and there is an increasing volume of sound, as it curves earthward —so, at least, I understood my informants to contend, though the explanation did not very obviously

harmonise with another piece of instruction forthcoming at the Front: namely, that a shell travels more quickly than does the sound it makes in travelling. However, the force of an explosion being outward and upward, certainly the bystander, if he hear a shell coming, is well advised to exchange a perpendicular for a horizontal attitude.

Of course it sometimes happens, as in the case under consideration, that a shell will continue on its course after provision has been made, in the manner indicated, for its arrival on earth. But if my companion's misgiving proved ill-founded, at least he succeeded in making me jump, and in strengthening my disinclination any longer to remain inactive under fire.

Before, however, stating what further befell us, I would like to mention one additional fact belonging to our two hours' sojourn by the roadside.

Every now and then Tommies would move across that shell-swept zone—Tommies in twos and fours and sixes. And how, I wonder, does the reader picture them?

They might have been moving with precipitancy, their manner revealing anxiety or perturbation. They might have been swinging along and demonstrating their contempt of danger by words of ribaldry or scoffing. They might have been advancing, with bent brows and set lips, oppressed by a sense of impending doom. But they were doing none of these things.

As with my two companions, and with all the other lads I had met at the Front, tranquillity was their chief characteristic. They were walking softly

and talking quietly, their faces reflecting not merely composure but complacency. Under no other circumstances can I conceive, among so many men and lads, such a sustained level of placidity. It was not a case of familiarity with danger having bred indifference. Their constant watchfulness, and the care with which they chose the most sheltered routes, proved them by no means forgetful of their peril; but the remembrance found them calm and content.

And now to continue.

Our programme left much to chance when we started on our tramp, with my two cheery companions carrying all the luggage. For half an hour it was our fate to journey along shell-smitten roads, all the time drawing farther away from the German artillery. Indeed, we presently arrived in a favoured region where no exploding shells were audible. And here I had a remarkable experience.

At cross-roads (where it seemed not unreasonable to hope for a stray ammunition waggon going my way) we sat on a bench in company with a youthful Tommy who, as I inferred, was stationed within contiguous skeleton walls, which had no doubt once formed part of a commodious estaminet. He was talking on some matter of minor importance, when into one of his remarks he surprised me by introducing an oath.

The power to astonish was due to the novelty. It was my first and last experience of bad language at the Front.

I took occasion to ask the boy when he last saw a shell explode.

"Fritz put over a couple into that field," he re-

plied, indicating a torn and ragged meadow, "three days ago. There's been nothing doing since."

Anon we were once more trudging along the road, soon to arrive in a village which, though shells had damaged most of the houses they had not destroyed, still retained a portion of its civil population. One battered house-front bore the attractive legend, "Eggs and Chips"; and presently we three joined several Tommies in a dingy little public parlour, where each of us received a liberal serving of the advertised food, supplemented by slabs of bread and mugs of indifferent coffee.

The proprietor (whose charges were unexpectedly modest) abode on the premises with his wife and five children; and while feeling personally indebted to him for remaining at his place of business, I could not help wishing that he had dispatched his family to a safer locality.

The discovery of that roadside victualler marked the turning point of my fortunes, for on emerging from his establishment, we happened upon a little military cart going whither I was bound.

The driver made me welcome to a seat by his side, and, having bidden the two lads a reluctant farewell, I surrendered myself to the good wholesome bumping that preceded my return to civilisation and the Press officer.

CHAPTER XVI

SPIRITUAL SUPREMACY

War Office brotherliness—Colonel Bate's hospital—Effective treatment of war-worn soldiers—The registration of British graves Testing the records—Pressed flowers in an official envelope—The tenderness of militarism—An interview at G.H.Q.—The General's reproof—Adventures at La Bassée—Smiles and sniping—An incident in a crater—Attached to a Public Schools battalion—My orderly and his pathetic experiences—A Stepney boy—Horseplay arrested by hymns—A Cockney climbing the Golden Stairs—"I know that His arms are round me."

COULD the comparison be instituted, as a matter of personal experience, between the great wars of past days and the greater war of our own time, perhaps the modern development to excite most remark would be, not man's hostilities up amid the clouds and down among the fishes, but the new latitude allowed in army organisation to the principle of humanity.

Of the great Salvation Army huts—those wooden temples of rest and refreshment for body and soul—the reader has already been afforded some idea; and here let me say that if in the crowded huts of our training camps at home, Tommy showed a zest for honest food values and for a helpful spiritual atmosphere, such appreciation was even keener in

the still more crowded huts of the campaign camps abroad.

But my most inspiring experience in this connection was to find the Salvation Army spirit—practical organised brotherliness—guiding the administration of two War Office institutions which, pending arrangements for my return to the firing line, I visited from General Headquarters.

Many unwounded soldiers become unfit for duty through general causes, and Colonel Bate, given the task of providing for their special needs, found himself tackling a piece of pioneer work. For modern trench warfare creates its own therapeutic problems, and the South African campaign had bequeathed him no useful guidance.

Colonel Bate went to work with a disused distillery, several acres of adjoining land, an assortment of outhouses, a capacity for conquering difficulties, and the belief that nothing is too good for Tommy.

At the date of my visit he had already treated 35,000 patients, and of those broken and useless soldiers 70 per cent. had returned to their regiments mended and (compared with new arrivals at the Front) of double value.

"For," explained the Colonel, "a man accustomed to the trenches is twice as useful as an inexperienced man."

Each patient stays a fortnight in the institution, of which, before inspecting the interior, I visited the entrance and the exit. At the former some London motor omnibuses had just arrived with freights of pale, dirty, tottery, war-worn invalids. At the

latter a company of healthy, hearty, and spruce soldiers were taking their leave.

On emerging from warm baths, the Colonel's guests receive new clothing and effective treatment for skin troubles; after which their teeth and their feet are seen to. Restful sleep in comfortable beds; nourishing and attractive meals; facilities for mental and physical recreation—such are general features of the treatment. Dentistry alone represents a huge department, and I found an army of artificers at work on false teeth. A specially constructed cinema, seating an audience of 400 persons, is adaptable as a church on Sundays, the choir-end being partitioned off on week-days as an ever-open shrine for prayer and meditation.

Finally, the patient is freshly and fully equipped from head to heel, so that, renewed within and without, he leaves Colonel Bate's hospital without an ache in his body, a hole in his socks, or a speck on his rifle.

The grateful lads are ever eager to make some return for the kindness shown them. Gardener patients keep the flower borders in excellent trim. Representatives of other trades and callings render expert services after their kind. The tinsmiths make souvenirs for the Colonel to bestow on his visitors. I received a serviette-ring made (down to the very solder used in joining it) out of a biscuit tin.

In the other institution—that concerned with the care and registration of British graves in France and Belgium—human sympathy was seen also to be exercising a widespread healing influence. Here again aims had to suggest methods with little as-

sistance from precedents; and circumstances enabled me to test and appreciate the efficiency of an organisation which, with an historic old château for its headquarters, has grown under the creative skill of Lieutenant-Colonel Weir.

In one department, I indicated the graves (among those on my Salvation Army list) that I had been unable to find, and at once the precise situation was revealed in every case save one, which was reported as within the German lines.

So far—the Colonel told me—47,000 graves had been visited and 53,000 registered, while 100 men and 38 motor cars were employed on the work.

"Searching for graves within the zone of fire," continued the Colonel, "is, of course, hazardous work, and only yesterday, I grieve to say, one of my most valued assistants was killed while on duty in the Ypres salient. He was a fine fellow and absolutely devoted to his work, which had been concerned more particularly with the cemetery at Bethune. So we have arranged that he shall be laid to rest there —which I am sure would have been his own wish.

"You will have noticed," the Colonel was presently adding, "that the men have small white crosses, while the creosoted pine-wood crosses put over officers' graves are larger, and that the two classes are kept apart. Officers have been objecting to this practice. They say they would prefer to be buried among their men, and that the idea of a superior memorial is repugnant to them. So we are proposing to do away with the differential treatment."

The work had only recently commenced, but there had already been several thousand inquiries as to the

location and condition of graves, of which 2,000 photographs had been dispatched to bereaved kinsfolk.

"The British Red Cross Society," Colonel Weir explained, "puts aside £50 a week to defray the cost of the photographs and of planting flowers on the graves, and in the latter part of our work we have recently been helped by the assistant director of Kew Gardens."

In one department of the old château I found a number of cartographers making large-scale plans of cemeteries within range of the hostile artillery, every grave being indicated in its precise situation. If, therefore (and experience had prompted the precaution), one of those burial-grounds were afterwards to be bombarded and its surface-marks obliterated, their accurate replacement would prove easy.

Elsewhere I chanced to espy a glowing sheet of bloom—crosses, wreaths, and other floral emblems, all labelled and grouped in readiness for dispatch in motor cars to various parts of Northern France and South-west Belgium.

But the Colonel was troubled at this accidental discovery of mine.

"That," he hastened to explain, "lies outside our scope. Our primary duty is to find, identify, and mark the graves, and that duty taxes the energies of our limited staff. We cannot undertake the placing of tokens on the graves, and the public must not be encouraged to believe that we can. As for those you saw, they have been provided in ignorance of our inability to do that work; but—well, I dare say our officers in these cases will find time to lay them on the graves."

And in this connection I cannot forbear from mentioning an incident that has since come within my personal knowledge. It was a case of the kind just indicated—namely, where the Bureau, as a special concession, conveyed a young widow's tokens to the sacred destination, afterwards writing to tell her that this had been done by "Captain ——, who, with his usual consideration, has forwarded the enclosed flowers which he found growing on the grave"; and the official letter contained a little packet of carefully pressed and preserved primula blooms.

Where will you easily find the parallel of that spirit—outside the Salvation Army, the Churches, and such institutions as the Y.M.C.A. (which has won so splendid a prominence in the war)?

"The arrogance and ruthlessness of militarism"—for many years I have accepted that orthodox political thought as a truism. It suggests a self-evident proposition, and seems a mere matter of logic and common sense. Champions of militarism have let it pass with an acquiescent shrug—nay, some have accepted ruthlessness, if not as a virtue, at any rate as a beneficial force. In my experience, indeed, the thought has gone entirely unconfuted—except at last by the facts.

At the Front I found only the reverse of arrogance and ruthlessness. Get at close quarters with the machine, see it actually at work—and behold the tenderness of militarism.

Following my visits to the firing zone, a General in high command at G.H.Q. asked me what had chiefly impressed me along the lines.

"Our men," I told him.

"Yes," he replied with a smile, "wonderful, aren't they? Quite amazing. Why, I thought I knew the British soldier before this war broke out, but since then he has again and again been a new revelation to me. But tell me, what has surprised you most in the British soldier as you have seen him out here?"

"His spirituality," was my reply. "By which I mean, his sense of the Unseen—his reliance on the Unseen—the peaceful outlook of his mind as he stands indifferent amid material dangers."

"But," replied the General, a trifle sternly, "surely you need not have been surprised at that. How could it be otherwise? We soldiers on a campaign are right up against death. The near view, of course, gives a new distinctness to what lies beyond."

As he spoke, I felt ashamed of the surprise to which it had been necessary to confess. A thousand apologies to our splendid men of all ranks. We self-centred civilians, careless in our sense of security, are apt to see only remote shadows where the self-sacrificing soldier, standing at attention, sees rock-like realities.

All my experience at the Front pointed that way. Indeed, this fact renders superfluous a detailed account of further adventures under fire.

As I went creeping with ducked head along front trenches at La Bassée, dodging round the brick-stacks and stepping gingerly into mine craters, my guide was a young Intelligence Captain, whose face wore a bright smile, which faded not even as we wriggled through dank channels cut in the clay, or squeezed along a narrow passage where one could feel bullets striking the other side of sandbags that

our hands and limbs were touching. And the scores and scores of men and lads we passed—their demeanour also bore witness to fraternity, a supreme composure, and an indifference to self. Neither by word nor look was there hint of repugnance, impatience, or self-pity—emotions which, perils apart, would not have lacked justification.

They slept and took their meals in muddy holes, did those defenders of European freedom and the British Empire; and their heavy clothing—nay, in places their very flesh—was caked with dirt.

What glorious grime! For others' sake, and at duty's call, Britain's sons were not only risking their lives (which, after all, is a clean, wholesome, and respectable thing to do), but cheerfully incurring vermin; and that is patriotism of a more subtle excellence.

But the kindly human note—that is what I fain would reveal to the reader. It was the more pronounced the closer we came to war's grim affairs.

My gracious young Captain heard grenades exploding in craters for which he was heading; so we loitered in a length of trench where sniping chanced to be the paramount military interest.

An officer had just had the top of his periscope shot away; and there was something very like a blush on his jolly-looking round face as he described the incident. At another point (where we were most politely asked to duck our heads) a German sniper was in the habit, it seemed, of taking one carefully selected opportunity every day—never more, lest his situation should be detected; for rival snipers in the trenches are ever waiting and watching, if haply

they may spy one another's loop-holes. Which things were told me in the gentlest of accents.

And when, some half-hour later, we arrived in the craters, and a courteous officer was showing us round, I was less impressed by the newly made grenade holes than by his friendly urbanity, which only took on a shade of gravity when a Sergeant stepped up to him, and, with a quiet dignity, reported:

"Lieutenant Ward has just been shot in Gallery 2, sir."

"A serious wound?" the officer turned to inquire.

"I think not, sir," replied the messenger, and, saluting, he quietly withdrew. Then we resumed our chat about the different behaviour of various kinds of grenades—a subject on which, as it happened, I had already received a good deal of enlightenment.

Attached to a Public Schools battalion on the previous day, I had for my orderly a Manchester lad who had had three chums fatally stricken by rifle grenades, and he told me all about it. Moreover, after dinner some subalterns and the doctor supplied me, out of their recent experience, with fully as much supplementary information on the subject as, in view of my impending visit to the trenches, I cared to receive.

Not indeed that I would willingly have forgone those tragic, and indeed ghastly, disclosures, for they served once more to show how marvellously our lads are upheld amid the trials and horrors of war.

That gentle-nurtured lad (he had been a choir-boy in Manchester Cathedral) practically beheld three old school chums leave this world, in rapid succession, and under the appalling conditions of a

projectile striking and shattering each familiar and beloved face.

"I saw one of them actually hit," said the boy softly. "That was my friend Teddy—an awfully decent chap. He and I were just about the same age, and we were always pretty thick at school. We got moved together from one form to another; and now Teddy has—has gone away."

His eyes were shining, but not with grief. We comfortable folk in civil life, saturated with unappreciated blessings, not seldom lapse into ungrateful faithlessness. The light on his countenance showed how far Teddy's friend was from committing that blunder. He spoke of Teddy, not as of a being who had ceased to exist, but rather as one who had passed into enduring security.

Those Public School boys—what splendidly unselfish young soldiers they make! For through one I came to have little personal glimpses of several—including the Hon. This and Lord That, proud to be doing groom's work in the British Army; and Charlie Blank, who was acting as sentry under the window of his inseparable college chum, Captain Willie So-and-So.

But in testifying to the splendid unselfishness of our Public School boys, I am far from attributing that condition to their social status. Class distinctions have no influence in the war area—that entrance zone to the Kingdom of Heaven. After leaving Eton and Mill Hill, I passed, at the Front, to Poplar and Stepney.

With a head like a plum-pudding (because of its roundness and the freckled face), Bugler Chandler

was doubly interesting as an old Barnardo boy and an enthusiastic Salvationist. When his battalion arrived in the firing line, forty of them (including a rough, tough group addicted to horseplay) were quartered in the remains of a farmhouse on La Bassée Road.

"They were all in one room," said Chandler, "and they started a-bombardin' one another—stones, jabbin' with rifles, and some playin' about with the bayernit. Seein' it was Sunday, I come in for my share. Somebody catched me one with a big brick."

But the plum-pudding was a picture of cheerful forgiveness.

"Well, in the roadway jest outside I see a Stepney chap—name o' Smith—wot was a Westleyan. So I goes to him and says, 'Come on,' I says; 'let's 'old a meetin'.' 'Right you are,' he says; and when we'd gorn back, I gets up on a biscuit-tin and gives out,

"'My Jesus, I love you,
I know Thou art mine.'

I've got 'alf a tidy voice, bein' noted for it."

As the round, honest, glowing face testified, Chandler was concerned merely for the truth. Self-depreciatory insincerities were not for him.

"The chorus we put to it was,

"'I do berlieve, I will berlieve,
That Jesus died for me;
That on the Cross He shed His blood,
From sin ter set me free.'

They knoo it, and ought to, too, seein' as there was some old 'uns as used to upset Salvation Army open-

airs—the remains of the old Skeleton Army, you might say."

He went on with the Order of Service.

"I got out my little Testament and read 'em a piece. 'We'll 'ave John iii. 16,' I says: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth——' You know the bit; it's one of my fav'rites. I put up Smith (he's a lot better scholar than me) to try and explain it. After that, 'e give 'is testimony, an' I give mine. Then come another hymn—one about

> "'We 'ave no other argumint,
> We 'ave no other plea.'"

What with the presence of the biscuit-tin, and the absence of surplices, altar, and lectern, no service could well have been more unlike Evensong, say, in the Established Church. But what of its results?

"There'd been a lot of laughin' at the start—not much; and when I was readin' John iii. 16 somebody 'ad somethin' to say, only the others told 'im to 'old 'is row. After that they was nice and quiet, and there was a lot joined in the singin'. But before we started on the second hymn, I says, 'Now, look 'ere, if anybody feels they 'ave got God in their 'eart,' I says, 'please step forward ter say you accept Him.' Before we was through with the first verse one came—a chap called Brown. The next was a Jew boy named Adolphus. We 'ad six others at that first meetin'."

But were these results merely emotional and temporary?

"It wasn't more than a month afterwards when

a private in the R.A.M.C. was askin' why our lot didn't carry on rough the same as they used to. 'That's all stopped now,' I says.

" 'Oo stopped it?' says 'e.

" 'The Lord Jesus Christ,' I says.

" ' 'Ow d'yer mean,' says 'e.

" 'Why, it's like this 'ere,' I says, 'I'm a Salvationist, and my chum is much the same, and we 'old meetings in the barn.' "

And next minute he was talking about something else.

"I've been by myself all the afternoon, and—wot d'yer think? I've been so 'appy I didn't 'ardly know wot to do. Fust I goes through all my fav'rite hymns, leadin' off with 'I'm climbing up the golden stairs to Glory.' Then I gets out my Testament and reads a very interestin' place—Acts xii. You know—about Peter bein' put in prison and the angel of the Lord comin' and makin' 'is chains fall off of 'im. Then I turned to John x. That's where it says 'I am the Good Shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.' That's eleven of ten; and, yer know, I do call that a fine bit."

For Chandler is one of the most appreciative possessors of a Bible that it was ever my privilege to meet. I began to discern a halo round the plum-pudding. But the account of his happy afternoon awaits the final touch he gave it:

"Then down I goes on my 'ands and knees and 'ad a good pray with the Lord."

And thus that Stepney Causeway boy was an exalted example of the predominant spirit at the Front —in the midst of the war he was absolutely at peace.

The "predominant" spirit, I say. For, of course, the picture has its other side—its awful other side. I saw that other side, not at first hand, but through the eyes of several Salvationists. With a sort of heart-broken sternness, they would tell of some rebellious one with whom they had pleaded in vain. Self-willed and a mocker, given to oaths and filthy conversation, he committed the supreme sin of refusing to acknowledge himself as a sinner. Reiterated entreaties and warnings were alike disregarded; the alternative to salvation was deliberately chosen. With pitiful and affrighted eyes, the Salvationist would tell how an appalling death came swiftly to seal that choice.

But tragedies of the soul belong to a depth of sadness that the human mind cannot fathom.

Let our thoughts turn finally to the glorious majority. At the Front our faithful champions find that the spirit is supreme and the flesh subordinate. The grocer's assistant and the earl's son stand shoulder to shoulder as mud-bedabbled brothers sharing, in return for their common sacrifice of earthly joys, the wondrous compensation of divine guardianship and consolation.

To that fact the investigator's personal experiences all pointed. Ringing in my memory as I recrossed the English Channel were these words:

"I know that His arms are round me."

Two lads in the firing line had actually spoken those words. Many others made the beautiful confession by implication.

THE END

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